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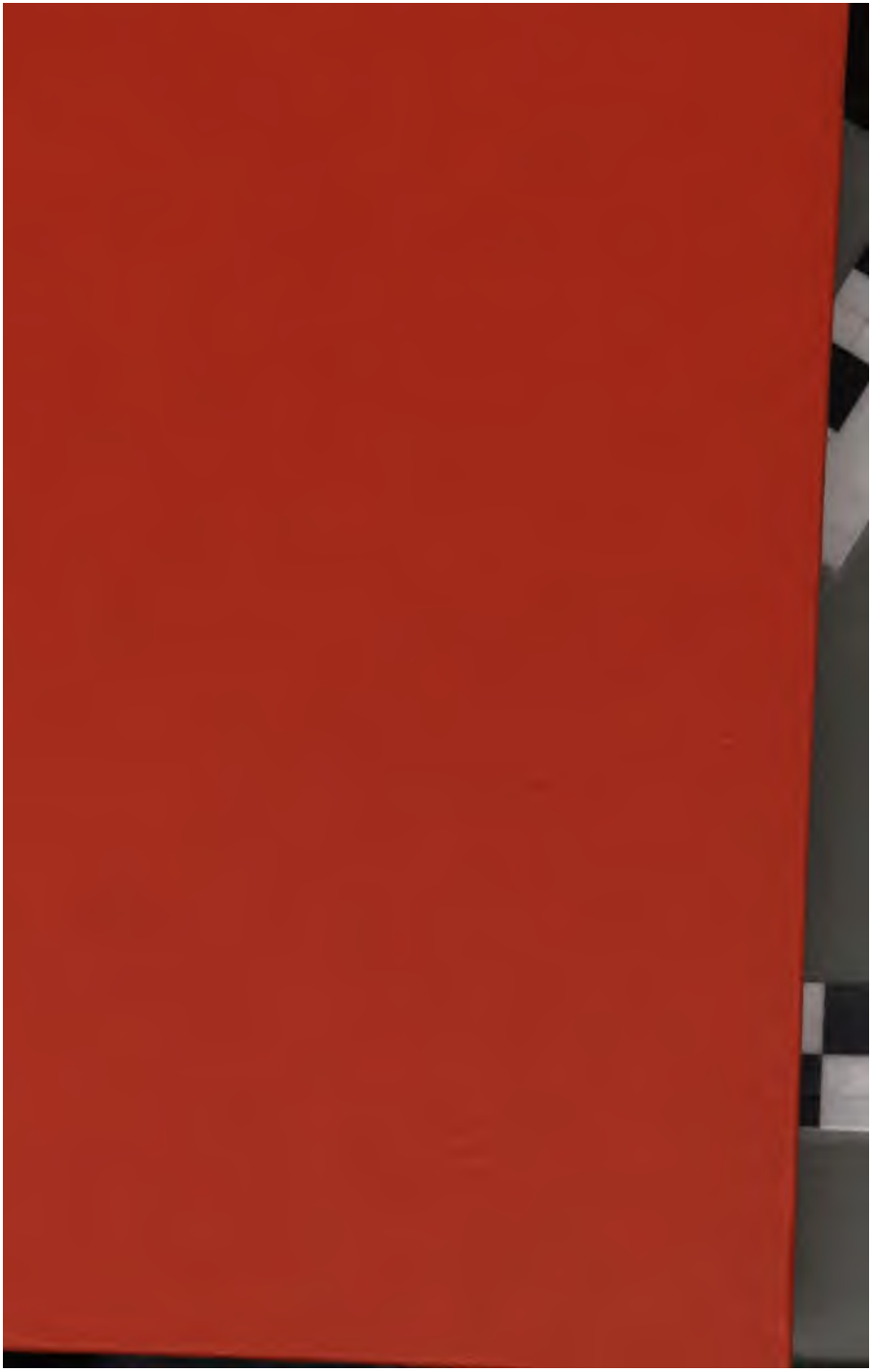

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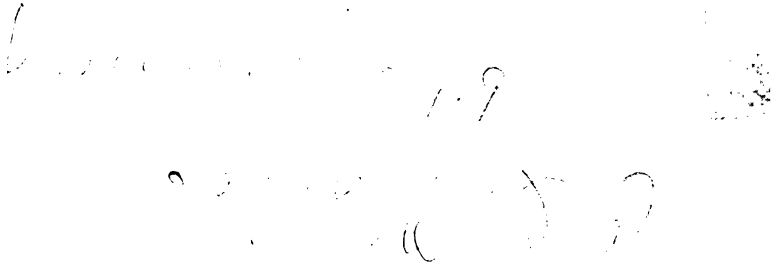

Major Crawford Worthington.

TWO RUNAWAYS

AND

OTHER STORIES

BY

HARRY STILLWELL EDWARDS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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PREFACE.

THE elements dealt with in these stories are the brighter and better parts of the older negro character, and of some of the people whose lives touch or touched his. Naturally the humorous and pathetic features have been prominently brought forth, and this has necessitated at times glimpses at the religious side of his life. It should be stated here that this negro is rarely ever irreverent; that, however his words may appear in print, in reality they never suggest anything improper. Those who read them, however amused they may be by his odd and incongruous ideas, methods of expression, and the scenes in which he becomes involved, should bear this fact in mind. The prayers, sermons, and hymns given here differ but little from the real, and that chiefly in arrangement. The white characters are mainly

oddities taken from life, and each story is based upon fact.

The author takes this opportunity of acknowledging the courtesy of Harper and Brothers, in granting permission to include here "Elder Brown's Backslide" and "'Ole Miss' and 'Sweetheart,'" taken from their magazine. The other stories appeared first in The Century Magazine.

Macon, Ga., July, 1889.

CONTENTS.

I	Two Runaways	1
II	Elder Brown's Backslide	33
III	An Idyl of "Sinkin' Mount'in"	63
IV	"Ole Miss" and "Sweetheart"	104
V	Sister Todhunter's Heart	131
VI	"De Valley an' De Shadder"	162
VII	"Minc"—A Plot	196
VIII	A Born Inventor	209
IX	Tom's Strategy	226

TWO RUNAWAYS
AND OTHER STORIES.

TWO RUNAWAYS.

I.

I HAVE little doubt but many people in middle Georgia yet remember Crawford Worthington, who, in ante-bellum days, kept open house in Baldwin County. Major Worthington, as he was called because of some fancied aid he had extended to his country during the difficulty with Mexico, was not a type—unless to be one of many singular characters in a region whose peculiar institutions admitted of the wildest eccentricities can constitute a type. He lived in the midst of peace and plenty upon his plantation not many miles from Milledgeville, surrounded by several hundred slaves, with whom he was upon singular but easy terms. His broad, rolling fields, his almost boundless pastures, his solemn-fronted and tall-columned house, his comfortable "quarters," where dwelt the negroes, all bespoke prosperity and independence. Independent he was; no prince ever ruled with sway more potent than this bachelor planter, surrounded by his

blacks and acknowledging none other than his own will.

This marked character was a man below medium height. His figure inclined very decidedly to portliness, and beyond a long narrow mustache and thin imperial of black and gray, his face was clean-shaven. Iron-gray hair in abundance crept out from under the white felt hat he generally wore, and his mixed suit of gray was illumined by a ruffled shirt and broad-spreading cuffs of the finest linen.

Self-willed and eccentric are weak words with which to stamp this gentleman's actions. In the long days of his idleness, when the Legislature was not in session, the negro was an unfailing source of amusement and study to him, and his sole diversion, for he despised books from the day he left college, and beyond a sporting journal and a paper from a neighboring city, he had no periodical. Of course he was a Whig.

Upon the day which I have selected to open a page in the experience of Major Crawford Worthington he was sitting upon his broad veranda, which swept back from the front around to the shady eastern exposure and overlooked the spacious back yard. Twoscore pickaninnies in short shirts had scrambled in front of him for small silver coins, as he scattered them upon the ground beneath. The tears wrung from him by their contortions and funny postures had dried upon his cheeks, and, weary of the sport, he had turned away the black athletes by means of a few gourds of

cold water skillfully applied to their half-clad forms, had settled back to enjoy the afternoon, and fell a-dreaming.

He remembered, in that easy method common to dreams, how years before he had sat upon that same porch watching a favorite old negro catching chickens in the yard. "Isam!" he had said; and, moving with jerky little motions that seemed always to attune themselves to his master's moods as expressed in his tones, Isam had minced up the steps.

"Isam," he had continued, "you are fixing to run away!"

He remembered the startled look that swept over the funny little man's countenance, and his answer:

"Lord mussy, Mass' Craffud, whoev'r hyah de like er dat!"

"Yes, sir; and you are fixing to start right away."

There had been genuine grief in the negro's voice as he replied:

"Fo' Gawd, Mass' Craffud, you dun got de wrong nigger dis time. Isam is nigh onter fifty year ole, en' he ain' nev'r lef' de place on er run yet. No, sah!"

Isam, however, spurred on by the suggestion, had really run off, and the overseer had scoured the country for him in vain. The black was enjoying freedom beyond recall, but one morning while the Major was breakfasting alone, and his two servants who attended the table were busy with fly-brush and waffles, Isam suddenly stood in the doorway. His

clothes were torn and soiled, and his face wore a hang-dog look that was in truth comical. Since that day old Isam had run away annually about the same time of the year, and this without any apparent cause.

Evidently this was what the Major was thinking of, for smiles came and went upon his face like shadows under the swaying mimosa. And when at last his eyes fell again upon the old negro:

"Isam!" he said, just as he had spoken years ago.

"Yes, sir," and the jerky little tones were the same.

"You are fixing to run away, Isam!"

"Me!" and again that reproachful, protesting voice.

"Yes, you; just as you have for years. You are getting ready to start. I have had my eye on you for a week. But," said the Major, fixing his lips after the Worthington fashion, "I am going to know this time where you go, and why you go."

There was silence a full minute; then the negro spoke:

"Mass' Craffud, 'deed en' I dunno 'zactly how et is. Hit jes' sorter strikes me, en' I 'm gone 'fo' I know 't. En' dat 's er sollum fac', sho'."

"Well," said the Major, "then go when it strikes you. It is a relief to get rid of you occasionally. But if you get off this time without letting me know when you start, I 'll cut your ears off when you come back, — if I don't ——"

And Isam believed him.

II.

ISAM'S annual runaway freak had worried Major Worthington more than anything of like importance he had ever confronted. He cared not an iota for his lost time, nor for his bad example; but it galled him to think that there was anything in connection with a negro that he could not fathom. In this old negro he had at last found a cunning and a mystery that evaded his penetration. Study as he might, no satisfactory explanation could ever be secured. Year after year, about the first of July, his factotum failed to appear, and the place that had known him so long knew him no more for a fortnight.

It was seldom that the Major ever threatened a servant. Never before in his life had a threat been leveled at Isam, who was a privileged character about the house. It was not surprising, therefore, that just before daybreak next morning a knock was heard at the Major's window. That individual understood it, and quietly donning his clothes went outside, assured that he would find Isam on hand. He was not mistaken.

"Hit 's dun struck me, Mass' Craffud, en' I 's 'bliged ter go," said Isam.

"Ah!" said the Major; "then we'll talk it over first."

Isam sat upon the steps, the major in his old rocker, and talk it over they did, until a pale glimmer trembled in the east. What passed between them no one ever learned; but finally the Major rose, and preceded by Isam, who bore a pack that gave him the appearance of a sable Chris Kringle, struck out straight across the fence and the fields, disappearing in the woods beyond. Only the hounds knew when they left, and these tugged at their chains with noisy pleadings, but in vain. When day finally rolled in with streaming banners, Woodhaven was without its master, and the overseer, too much accustomed to the eccentricities of that absent power to worry over his sudden departure, reigned in his stead.

The path of the runaways led first directly past a growth of plum-bushes, an acre in extent, that stood out in the open field, a small forest in itself. This was the burial ground, where without regard to order or system the graves of departed negroes, covered with bits of glass, broken cups, abandoned cans, and other treasures of the trash heap, dotted the shadowy depths. These glimmered faintly in the gray half-light, and Isam shivered slightly as he passed. The movement did not escape the notice of the Major, who smiled grimly as he said:

"You don't come this way, Isam, when you run off by yourself."

The sound of a human voice was reassuring, and the negro answered cheerily:

"Yessir. Ain' nuthin' go'n' ter tech ole Isam. All dem in dere is dun boun' en' sot."

"And what the deuce is 'bound and sot'?"

The Major's inquiry betrayed impatience rather than curiosity; he knew well how secretive is the negro of any class when interrogated in connection with his superstitions. Isam shook his head.

"Lor' sakes, Mass' Craffud, don' you know all 'bout dat?"

"No," said the Major testily; "if I did, I would n't be wasting breath asking a fool nigger."

"Well," said Isam, willing to compromise in the interest of peace, "w'en er sperrit gits out'n de flesh, de only way hit can be boun' en' sot es ter plug er tree." He stepped in front of a broken pine near the path, and examined it critically. "Dere 's er plug roun' hyah fur mi'ty nigh ev'y wun dem graves, ef yer knows where ter look."

"What do you mean by this nonsense, Isam? Do you expect me to swallow such stuff?"

"Hit 's er fac', Mass' Craffud. Dere, now, dere 's er plug, sho' nuff."

Years before — Major Worthington remembered it then — he had come across a split pine from which a half dozen of these plugs had fallen, and was surprised by the scare it had caused on the plantation.

They were made up of old nails, bits of glass, red pepper, and tar, and sprinkled with the blood of a chicken. Each plug contained a few hairs from the head of the deceased and a piece of a garment that had been worn next the skin. Each ingredient had an important significance, but exactly what it was no one knew or knows to this day, unless some aged Voodoo lingers in the land and holds the secret.

The Major examined the signs pointed out. Only a practiced eye in broad daylight would have been apt to discover them. He deliberately took out his knife and began to pick at a plug. The change that came over Isam was ludicrous. He clutched the Major's arm and chattered out:

"Don', Mass' Craffud! don' do it, honey; you mout let de meanes' nigg'r on de place git loose, en' dere ain' no tellin' w'at 'u'd happ'n. You git de chill 'n' fev'r 'n' cat'piller 'n' bad craps, sho' 's yer born. Oh, Lordy! Lordy! Lordy! Dere, now, t'ank de Lord!"

The Major had calmly persisted in his efforts to extract a plug until his knife-blade snapped. With a great pretense of rage he persisted with the broken blade until finally, sure enough, out fell the plug. In an instant the negro had seized it and thrust it in place again, and with his back to the tree was begging so piteously, the Major could not resist.

"All right, idiot," he said laughingly. "Lead the way; I won't trouble it."

The Start.

Isam moved off without much ado, and the Major, who was not built for running races and climbing fences, had as much as he could do to keep up. The negro wagged his head ominously as he hurried along.

"Dere ain' no tellin' but w'at dat nigg'r dun got loos' en' 'gun his curvortin' roun' 'fo' now. One time, lightnin' busted er tree ov'r dere, en' seben er dem plugs drap out; en' dat summer de typhoid fev'r struck seben nigg'rs, en' de las' one uv 'm died spang dead. Ain' nev'r had dat fev'r 'fo' er sence on de place. But dey do say," continued Isam, now anxious to communicate his extensive knowledge of the subject, "ef dem folks had n' burn de light'ud fum dat tree, nuthin' 'd happ'n. Bet you can't git er nigg'r 'n Baldwin County ter burn eny mo' uv de lightnin's light'ud, en' mi'ty few go'n' ter rake pine straw 'bout dere."

III.

THE human race has certainly been evolved from a barbaric into a partly civilized state. At odd seasons the old instinct crops out and regains control of us. Major Worthington had entered upon his brief lapse into savagery, though he did not realize it. Ill-adapted as he was for foot-journeys of considerable length, the flush of new freedom sustained him.

But the unwonted exercise told at last. A halt must, perforce, soon have been ordered, when Isam plunged over a sharp decline, and indicating a long line of paler green and a denser growth in front, exclaimed:

"'Mos' dere now!"

The Major knew the place. It was the line of the Oconee River mapped in verdure. Reaching the welcome shade, he dropped down where Isam had already pitched his bundle.

Mumbling after the fashion of old darkies, a meaning smile upon his lips, which, after all, is but merely thinking aloud, Isam brought from the well-filled depths of his kit a small stone jug. Soon, after certain rites and ceremonies appropriate to the occasion, he approached the Major, and with a triumphant

flourish extended a large tumbler of red liquid from which gracefully arose a small forest of mint.

"Dun foun' er noo spring," he said; but the man propped against the cypress was motionless, and his hands were folded peacefully in his lap. Stooping down, Isam peered cautiously under the broad hat-brim, with the whispered ejaculation: "Lor' bless my soul, ef he ain' dun gone ter sleep. I recken dat las' ten-railer war pow'ful wurrin' ter 'r man 'r his fat. Mass' Craffud! Mass' Craffud!" No answer came.

Getting down on his knees, he carefully inserted with a spoon a few drops of the beverage between the lips of the sleeper and allowed them to percolate downward. As the "apple" of the tightened throat darted up and glided down again into place, he whispered:

"Mass' Craffud, es yer dun fainted?"

The eyes opened, and the Major sat bolt upright. The next minute he drained off the drink, and sat contemplating the honest face, in whose eyes was a peculiar look.

"T'ank de goodness!" exclaimed Isam. "I bin er-hold'n' dis hyah julup hyah fur half er hour. Ain' nev'r known you ter balk at er julup 'fo' en forty yeaurs!"

"That came in the right time, Isam, and it 's good whisky," said the Major heartily. "Where did you get it?"

"Yessir," chuckled the negro, "hit 's good: but hit ain' good ter ask er stray hen w'at 's layen' en your orchud whar she belong, er how many teef she got."

The Major realized that he had become a guest. He laughed, sank back against the tree, and soon again was lost in slumber. When he awoke there had been a decided change in his surroundings. A low fire burned a few yards away, and sundry flips of bacon were browning in a frying-pan set jauntily thereon, while from the ashes beneath the brown ends of hoe-cakes protruded.

"'T ain' but er bite," said Isam apologetically, "but des' wait tell de fish git mixed up wid dem sum er dese days, en' den you see w'at hit es ter be loos' en' free."

To be loose and free! The Major fixed his eyes upon the old negro as he produced tin platters from his kit and transferred the smoking viands, humble but savory, from the frying-pan. The words haunted him, and as the smoke arose there floated upon his vision pictures of boyhood's escapades. Isam had belonged to him from his own infancy, though for the first fifteen years the question of ownership seemed altogether unsettled, for the negro was five or six years the senior. How they had hunted and strayed off, and set gums for rabbits and snares for birds, and robbed nests! Loose and free! Old Isam surveyed with proud satisfaction the Major's fierce attack upon the morning meal.

"Dere ain' no spring chick'n en der pan," he said sententiously, "but er fuss-rate app'tite kin git des' es good er grip on er flip er bacon es hit kin on er yaller-leg' chick'n."

"There is something in that," said the Major. "Get your flip, you black rascal, and go to eating." But Isam shook his head.

"No, sah. W'en er nigg'r feeds he don' wan' no w'ite folks roun'. He wan' ter git off en' mop de pan 'thout 'tract'n' 'tention ter hisse'f."

"It seems to me," said the Major, as he transferred another flip of bacon to his platter, "that it must be mighty hard for an honest nigger to live comfortably out here."

Isam's face took on a look of personal injury.

"Er hones' nigg'r," he said, stirring up the ashes and inserting fresh cake, "don' eat no mo' out hyah den he do at home; not a bit. Rashuns es rashuns ennywhar you fine 'em. En' I hear say," he continued significantly, "w'en folks goes er-vis'tin' dey don' 'quire es ter de year-marks uv de pig, w'en back-bone en' spar'-ribs en' chine es sot out."

"Your idea of etiquette is perfectly sound, Isam."

"En' der only time w'en folks w'at 's vis'tin' got er right ter git der backs up es w'en de gem'man feed 'esse'f high en' feed t' others low."

With an air of dignity the old negro gathered up the remnants of the spread, the Major having fin-

ished, and retired to allay the pangs of an increased appetite; but he was doomed to further delay. A most profane ejaculation fell from the Major's lips and came to his ears.

"Des' es I said, dere 't is ergin — terbacker, now." He put aside the repast, and grumblingly investigated the kit once more. "En' I reck'n w'en he see dis yer bag er terbacker he go'n' ter want hits ped'gree all way back."

Nevertheless he produced it with a handful of corn-cob pipes, and cutting a reed stem handed to the Major the finest smoking outfit in the world. As Isam skillfully balanced a glowing coal upon the little heap of tobacco, he concluded:

"Somehow nuther sump'n said 'bout time de run-away noshun struck in, 'Isam, you go'n' ter see com'ny ter-day, en' hit 's go'n' ter be Mass' Craffud'; so I des' laid in er extrer bag spesh'ly fur 'm."

The Major merely drew in and expelled a cloud of smoke. He contented himself with saying, "You are very thoughtful"; and laughing softly to himself, Isam retired to his meal. As he finished, and stuffed his own cob-pipe full of "natural leaf" and perique — brought along especially for his master — Isam cast his eye skyward.

"Mos' ten er'clock. Mus' be movin' out er hyah. Bimeby overseer en' houn' be 'long in er hurry. Got ter git whar meat es thicker too. Dat bacon en' hoe-

cake hard ter beat, but dey don' half fill de bill wid er run'way nigg'r. Des' wait twell we git er mess er red-belly en' brim, en' I reck'n sho' nuff de fun go'n' ter b'gin ter start. Time we uz go'n', Mass' Craffud."

The Major rose and followed cheerily. Skirting the swamp, Isam soon found a hog-path, and presently the runaways came in sight of the river. A bateau was tied up in a little branch near by, and in it lay an axe and a paddle.

"Isam," said the Major as he clambered in, "how does it happen that you find a boat and axe all ready here, and the runaway notion only struck you just before day this morning?"

Isam shook his head as he chuckled:

"Hit ain' de rite time er day ter 'splain t'ings, Mass' Craffud. Dere ain' no tellin' w'at time dem houn''s go'n' ter strike er hot trail, en' de tree dat you kin clime ain' go'n' ter lif' you out'n de reach uv a dog."

The little boat, propelled by vigorous strokes, shot out into the river, and gliding under the willows bore its passengers swiftly downstream.

IV.

SHUT out from sight of the stream stretched a Bermuda sward hemmed in by gigantic trees, in whose boughs the cicadas were singing. The old boyish enthusiasm rose strong within the Major.

"This is the camp," he said, "and there," pointing to the log-jammed creek behind him, slowly mingling its clear waters with the river's mud, "is the place for bream and red-bellies." Isam fairly shouted.

"Dere, now, dey ain' nev'r no use tellin' er man wot knows how ter fish whar ter drap er line. De two go 'long tergether. Des' you tek dese hyar lines, Mass' Craffud, en' git reddy fer supper, w'ile I 'ten' ter de res'."

Throwing open his pack, Isam displayed his simple tackle, hurried around and cut a pole from a neighboring brake, and, peeling the bark from a fallen tree, picked out a handful of flatheads. Adjusting himself to a log, the Major cast his line and began to draw in the bream.

"Dere, now," chuckled Isam, "I ain' seen you do dat sence you was er-court'n Miss 'Mandy Bullard en' we all wuz down ter Sykes's fish-pond."

But the Major was landing fish, and did not have time to listen to Isam; observing which, that indi-

vidual, casting an inquiring glance at the sun, seized his axe and went to work in the canebrake. In an incredibly short space of time he had cut down and dragged up enough poles to construct a rude hut, and soon after completed the shanty. Then, with one happy glance at the fugitive perched upon the log contentedly warring with the bream, he glided off into the woods and disappeared from view.

Despite the popular notion concerning the runaway negro, he never got very far from civilization in his wanderings. The swamp was to him merely a retreat. His smoke-house was elsewhere. When Isam glided away leaving the Major pleasantly engaged, he followed hog-paths with unerring instinct and recalled landmarks with surprising accuracy. But where he was going and for what are matters that can wait. The Major must not be left alone.

Isam had not been long gone before the fisherman began to suffer from the perversity of the piscatorial god. The bream and red-belly ceased to bite. The colony had been exhausted or driven away; and in its place settled a tribe of shining cats. These began to give the Major occupation. His float would go under handsomely; there would be a strong pull, and, resisting steadily, a cat-fish would break into view.

The Major stood this persecution, it may be, for fifteen minutes; then the patience of the fisherman

was exhausted. As the hour wore away, I regret to say that the swearing became almost continuous, and the Major reached what is generally termed a "state of mind."

Isam was approaching the camp when the language of the fisher attracted his attention.

"Oomhoo," he said, stopping to listen. "Sum'n' dun gone wron' wid Mass' Craffud."

Creeping to the edge of the brake, he beheld his companion engaged in his unequal conflict with the fate that at times overtakes all fishers. Isam ducked back and held his sides.

"Ef dere 's anyt'n' go'n' ter upsot dat kind er man quick, hit 's cats. Des' liss'n now!"

The negro peeped out again. The Major was lashing the water with an unfortunate victim; then he saw the irate fisherman drop a huge cat upon the bank, and with the paddle dash him to pieces, and again grind another beneath his heel, and end by kicking the remains far out into the stream.

Isam reveled in this display of passion until wearied out, and then prepared to make his presence known. Going back a hundred yards into the canebrake, he shouldered his well-stuffed sack, and lifted his voice in song:

"Sum folks say nigg'r won' steal;
I caught one in my co'n-fiel'."

He was cheerfully giving expression to this sug-

gestive refrain, when he broke in upon the scene and pretended to stumble over a gasping cat. Down came his bag.

"Dere, now. Ef I cood pick'd de ve'y fish I wanted fur ter mek dat chowd'r, hit 'u'd er been dis same cat." Isam's teeth shone and his eyes glistened. As he looked about and saw the other unwelcome captives he threw up his hands.

"Where you catch 'm, Mass' Craffud?"

"Right here," said the Major, regarding him suspiciously; "and I have n't been catching anything else for an hour."

"Den don' yer stop now; you des' go rite 'long ketchin' 'em, en' we go'n' ter hav' er chowder fum 'way back. 'Spec' we 'll want 'bout six more big ones. How long es hit bin sence you had a cat-fish chowd'r, Mass' Craffud?"

The Major's passion was vanishing.

"About twenty years, I reckon, Isam."

"Well, den, hit ain' go'n' ter be twenty years 'fo' you git ernuther. I 'm go'n' to git ev'n wi' dese hyah bigmoufs en 'bout er minit. Lor'! Lor'! Es I wuz cummin' 'long back I kep' a-say'n', 'Now Mass' Craffud ain' go'n' ter ketch nuthin' but brim er yaller-belly w'at ain' good fer chowd'r meat, en' all dis co'n en' yinguns gotter be eat des' dry so'; en' bless goodness, hyah 's de chowd'r dun ha'f made en' lyin' reddy." And Isam began to shake his own prizes from the bag.

"Where did you get that corn?" The Major fixed his eye sternly upon the nonchalant babbler.

"Dis co'n," said Isam, shucking an ear, "es w'at dey calls 'vol'nterry co'n.' Hit es co'n w'at cum up fum las' year seed w'at de river en' de hog scatter. En' dese yinguns es uv de wil' kine w'at es always up en' er-doin'." The Major made no reply, but fixing a new flathead on his hook cast it far into the stream.

Above a blazing fire Isam soon had his kettle swinging, and within its depths sputtered great chunks of fish as they rose and sank in a lake of green corn and onions. With the earnestness of a wizard preparing his strange concoctions, he hung over the boiling mixture, adding here a pinch of pepper and there a dash of salt. As he stirred the savory mess he sang a cheerful plantation ditty. The dusk of evening had fallen, and the red light of the flames brought out his figure in bold relief. He seemed a veritable genius of the swamp, and, lured from his sport by the cheerful picture and the odor of the meal, the Major cast his line down and strode into the lighted circle.

V.

TO OTHER pens must be left the record of the runaways' every-day life. These pages would not hold the true chronicle of this novel expedition. Here only is space enough to deal with the prominent features and string them upon a particolored thread. Day after day the fishermen plied their rods. Day after day the kettle and the skillet and the coals gave forth their dainties. Fish-fries decked the table one day; a split rabbit, snared in the canebrake, broiled to a turn, served for the next; even a tender shote yielded up his innocent young life, and chowders came thick and fast.

But Isam was no longer the chief factor in the daily sins committed. Painful as the truth may seem, it must be told. The portly Major became accessory before the fact as well as after. And worse, he became actively *particeps criminis*. He learned to creep into the spreading field of "voluntary corn"—which, by the way, invaded the swamp lands, and rose in columns of surprising regularity—and to load a bag with the juicy ears. He renewed his early skill, and crawled behind snake-fences to abstract dew-

christened watermelons. In short, he gave way to savagery; for the time being civilization knew him not.

No especial time for breaking camp had been set, but the time was approaching, and the signs were evident. The whisky had long since vanished, and the tobacco was threatening to follow the whisky, when an event occurred which left a tradition that old folks in middle Georgia yet tell with tear-dimmed eyes and straining sides.

The worthy pair had been foraging for dinner, and were returning heavily laden. The Major bore a sack of corn, and Isam led the way with three watermelons. Unless the reader has attempted to carry three watermelons, he will never know the labor that Isam had imposed upon himself. The two had just reached the edge of the canebrake, beyond which lay the camp, and were entering the narrow path, when a magnificent buck came sweeping through, and collided with Isam with such force and suddenness as to crush and spatter his watermelons into a pitiful ruin, and throw the negro violently to the ground. Instantly the frightened man seized the threatening antlers, and held on, yelling lustily for help. The deer made several ineffectual efforts to free himself, during which he dragged the negro right and left without difficulty, but, finding escape impossible, turned fiercely upon his unwilling captor, and tried to drive the terrible horns through his writhing body.

"O Lord, O Lord!" screamed Isam; "O Lord, Mass' Craffud, cum holp me tu'n dis buck loos'."

The laugh died away from Major Worthington's lips. None knew better than he the danger into which Isam had plunged. Not a stick, brush, stone, or weapon of any description was at hand, except his small pocket-knife. Hastily opening that, he rushed upon the deer. Isam's eyes were bursting from their sockets, and appealed piteously for the help his stentorian voice was frantically imploring until the woods rang with his agony. Major Worthington caught the nearest antler with his left hand, and made a fierce lunge at the animal's throat. But the knife's point was missing, and only a trifling wound was inflicted. The next instant the deer met the new attack with a rush that carried Isam with it, and thrust the Major to the ground, the knife falling out of reach. Seeing this, the negro let go his hold, rolled out of the way, and with a mighty effort literally ran upon the top of a branching haw-bush, where he lay spread out like a bat, and moaning piteously.

"Stick ter 'im, Mass' Craffud, stick ter 'im! Wo' deer! wo' deer! Stick ter 'im, Mass' Craffud!"

And the Major stuck. Retaining his presence of mind, he threw his left arm over the deer's neck, and, still holding with his right the antler, looked about for Isam, who had so mysteriously disappeared. Something like the hold he had had more than once

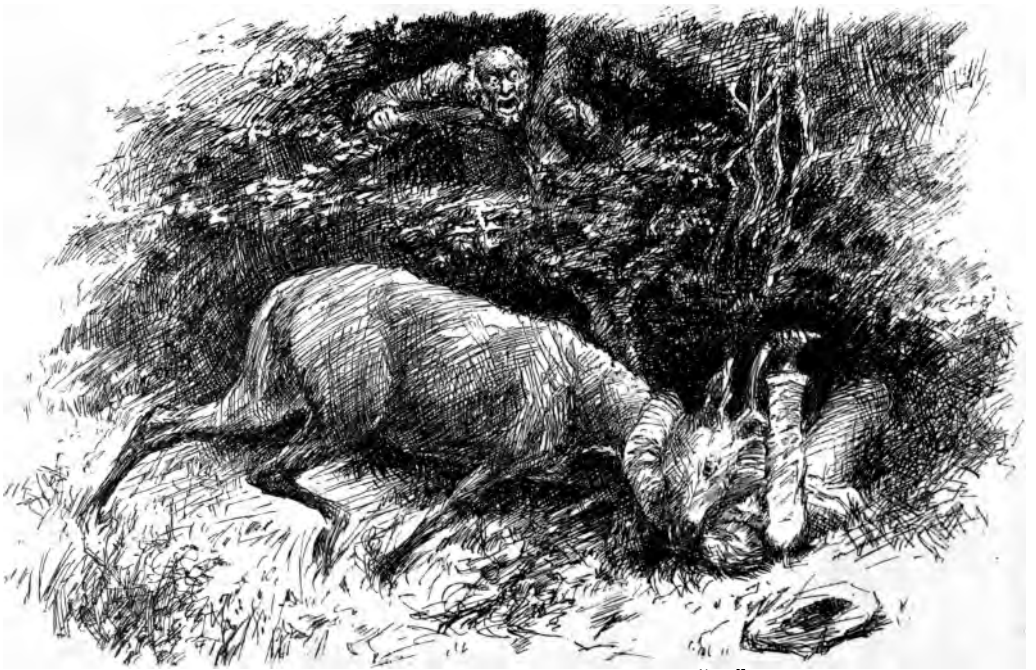
in boyhood served him well in school combats. But he had never tried to hold a full-grown buck, and so he somewhat anxiously searched the scene for the valiant negro. The first words he heard distinctly were:

"Stick ter 'im, Mass' Craffud, stick ter 'im. Hit 's better fur one ter die den bofe! Hole 'im, Mass' Craffud, hole 'im! Wo' deer! wo' deer! Stick ter 'im, Mass' Craffud. Steddy! Look out fur es ho'n! Wo' deer! Steddy, Mass' Craffud!"

By this time the struggles of the beast had again ceased, and, wearied from his double encounter, he stood with his head pulled down to the ground half astride the desperate man, who was holding on for life. Whether Major Worthington was frightened or not it is hard to say; probably he was; but there was no doubt about his being angry when he saw Isam spread out in the haw-bush, and heard his address. His face was livid with rage, and foam and sweat mingled upon it. As soon as he caught his breath, he burst forth with:

"You infernal black rascal! why don't you come—down out of that—bush and help—me!" Isam's face was pitiful in its expression. His teeth chattered, and he fairly shook the bush with his trembling.

"Don', Mass' Craffud, don'; you ain' got no time ter cuss now. Lif' up yo' voice en' pray! Lord, Lord, ef ev'r er man had er call ter pray, you dun got it now."



Stick ter 'im, Mass' Craffud, stick ter 'im."

For one instant it looked as if the Major would abandon his attempt to hold the deer and turn his attention to the bush; but he did not have an opportunity to carry out such a resolution. Revived by his moment's rest, the buck made another effort for freedom and revenge. He dragged his corpulent captor in a circle, he rolled him on the sod, he fell over him, pounded him, and stamped, but without relief. The desperate man clung to his hold with a grip that could not be broken. It was the grip of death; indeed, it was now a question of life or death.

Wearied down at last, the deer gave himself and victim another breathing-spell, and the Major continued:

"If ever—I get loose from this—brute,—you infernal scoundrel,—I 'll not leave a—whole bone in your body!"

"Don' say dat, Mass' Craffud, don'! You must n't let de sun go down on yo' wraf! O Lord!" he continued, getting on his all-fours and as near a reverent posture as the circumstances would admit of, "don' you mine nuth'n' he es er-sayin' now, cos he ain' 'spons'bl'. Lord, ef de bes' aingil you got wuz down dere in his fix, en' er fool deer wuz er-straddl'n' 'im, dey ain' no tell'n' w'at 'u'd happ'n, er w'at sorter langwidge he 'd let loos'. Wo' deer! wo' deer! Stick ter 'im, Mass' Craffud, stick ter 'im. Steddy, deer! Steddy, Mass' Craffud!"

The Major got another resting-spell. By this time his breath was almost gone, and his anger had given way to unmistakable apprehension. He realized that he was in a most desperate plight, and that the only hope of rescue lay in the frightened negro up in the haw-bush. He changed his tactics when the deer rested again.

"Isam," he said gently.

"Yes, honey."

"Isam, come and help me, old fellow."

"Good Gawd, Mass' Craffud," said the negro earnestly, "dere ain' nuthin' I wood n' do fur you, but hit 's better fur one ter die 'n two. Hit 's a long sight better."

"But there is no danger, Isam; none whatever. Just you come down and with your knife hamstring the brute. I 'll hold him."

"No, sah! no, sah! no, sah!" said Isam loudly and with growing earnestness. "No, sah! it won' wuk. No, sah! You er in fur hit now, Mass' Craffud, en' et can't be holped. Dere ain' nuthin' kin save yer but de good Lord, en' he ain' go'n' ter, less'n you ax 'im 'umble like, en' er-b'liev'n' en es mussy. I prayed w'en I wuz down dere, Mass' Craffud, dat I did, en' look w'at happ'n. Did n' he sen' you like er aingil, en' did n' he git me up hyah safe en' wholesum? Dat he did, en' he nev'r 'spec' dis nigg'r war go'n' ter fling 'esse'f und'r dat deer arter he trouble hisse'f to show

'im up hyah. Stick ter 'im, Mass' Craffud, stick ter 'im. Wo' deer! wo' deer! Look out fur es ho'n! Stick ter 'im, Mass' Craffud. Dere, now—t'ank de Lord!"

Again the Major got a breathing-spell. The deer in his struggles had gotten under the haw-bush, and the Major renewed his earnest negotiations.

"Isam," he said, as soon as his condition would allow of conversation, "if you will get down—and cut this brute's legs—I will give you your freedom."

Isam's only answer was a groan.

"And fifty acres—of land." Again that pitiful moan.

"And—a mule and a—year's rations." The Major paused from force of circumstances. After a while the answer came:

"Mass' Craffud!"

"Well?"

"You know dis nigg'r b'en hard-work'n' en' hones' en' look atter you en' yo'n all es life."

"Yes, Isam," said the Major, "you have been—a faithful, honest—nigger." There was another pause. Perhaps this was too much for Isam. But he continued after a little while:

"Well, lemme tell you, honey, dere ain' nuthin' you got er kin git w'at 'll tem' dis nigg'r ter git down dere. W'y," and his voice assumed a most earnest and argumentative tone, "'deed 'n' hit 'u'd be 'sultin' de

Lord. Ain' he dun got me up hyah out'n de way, en' don' he 'spec' me fur ter stay? You reck'n he got nuth'n' 't all ter do but keep puttin' Isum back up er tree? No, sah! he dun 'ten' ter me, en' ef you got enny dif'culty down dere, you en' de deer kin fight it out. Hit 's my bizness des' ter keep er-prayin'. Wo' deer! wo' deer! Steddy, Mass' Craffud. Dere, now—t'ank de Lord!"

Again the Major defeated the beast's struggles, and there came a truce. But the man was well-nigh exhausted, and saw that unless something was done in his behalf he must soon yield up the fight. Something like a spasm of fear flashed over his face, and in the glance he cast about him there was the one panic-stricken appeal that all men yield to at some time. It was hard to die there by the terrible horns of the beast astride him, whose eyes glared into his, and whose hot breath was in his face. What a death!

But the next instant he was calm and cautious. There came to his assistance his fine knowledge of the negro character.

"Isam," he said, slowly and impressively. But Isam was praying. The Major could hardly trust his ears when he heard the words.

"But, Lord, don' let 'm peer'sh 'fo' yo' eyes. He 's b'en er bad man. He cuss 'n' sware, 'n' play keerds, 'n' bet on horse-race, 'n' drink whisky ——"

"Isam ——"

"En' he steal — good*ness*, he tek ter steal'n' like er duck ter water. Roast'n' yers, watermilluns, chick'n — nuthin' too bad fur 'im ——"

"Isam ——"

"'T ain' like er nigg'r steal'n', Lord; dey dun know no better, en' can't git t'ings enny er-way, while he got money; but don' let 'im peer'sh rite 'fo' yo' eyes. Tek him by de slack er es briches en' shek 'm ov'r de flames, but don' let 'im drap ——"

"Isam!"

The word came upward in tones of thunder. Even Isam was obliged to regard it. He did so from force of habit.

"Yessir."

Then he sobbed forth: "Oh, Lordy, Lordy, I t'ot we wuz dun home ag'in."

"No, sir," said the Major sternly, "we are not at home, and I 'll never get there. I am going to die."

Isam gave a yell that ought to have been heard a mile away.

"Oh, don' let 'im die! Skeer 'im, skeer 'im, Lord, but don' let 'im die!"

"Yes," continued the Major, "I am going to die; but let me tell you something, Isam. I have been looking into this beast's eyes until I recognize him." A sound came from the haw-bush like the hiss of a snake, as the negro with ashen face and beaded brow gasped out an unintelligible word. The right chord

had been touched at last. "You remember Dr. Sam!" Isam's only reply was a moan that betrayed an agony too deep for expression. "Well, this is Dr. Sam: he got loose the other day when the plug fell out, and he and I will never give you another hour of peace as long as you live ——."

The sentence was never finished. With a shriek that was blood-curdling in its intensity of fear and horror, the negro came crashing down through the bush with his hands full of leaves, straight upon the deer.

This was the crisis.

The frightened animal made one desperate plunge, taking the startled Major by surprise, and the next instant found himself free. He did not remain upon the scene, or he would have beheld the terrified negro get upon his feet, run round in a frenzy of terror, and close his last circle at the foot of the bush, up which he scurried again like a squirrel, old as he was. The Major lay flat upon his back, after trying in vain to rise. Then the reaction came. He fixed his eye upon the negro above and laughed until the tears washed the dirt from his face: and Isam, holding his head up so that his vision could encompass the narrow horizon, said slowly and impressively:

"Mass' Craffud, ef de Lord had n't 'sist'd on Isum cum'n' down ter run dat deer off, 'spec' by dis time you 'd been er-flopp'n' yo' wings up yander, er else

sput'n' on er grindi'on down yander." And from his elevated perch Isam indicated the two extremes of eternity with an eloquent sweep of his hand.

But the Major had small time for laughter or recrimination. In the distance there rang out faintly the full-mouthed cry of a hound. Isam heard it. For him it was at once a welcome and a stimulating sound. Gliding to the ground, he helped the wearied Major to his feet, and started on the run for the boat, crying:

"Run, Mass' Craffud! wors' 'n er deer 's cummin'. Hit 's dem folks w'at know about dat corn en' watermilluns, en' yer can't 'splain nuthin' ter er houn' dog."

Broken down as he was, the Major realized that there was wisdom in the negro's words, and followed as best he could. The camp traps were thrown into the boat, and the little bark was launched. A minute later the form of a great thirsty-looking hound, the runaways' *bête noire,* appeared on the scene. But the hunters who came after found naught beyond the signs of a camp, if they found anything, and soon followed the hound, which had regained the trail of the buck, and yelping passed into the distance. The boat had long since passed the bend.

How Isam ever settled his difficulty needs no explanation. But it may interest the reader to know that one day he bore a message and a check that settled the corn and melon debt; and they tell it in mid-

dle Georgia that every year thereafter, until the war-cloud broke over the land, whenever the catalpa worm crept upon the leaf two runaways fled from Woodhaven and dwelt in the swamps, "loos' en free."

ELDER BROWN'S BACKSLIDE.

I.

LDER BROWN told his wife good-by at the farm-house door as mechanically as though his proposed trip to Macon, ten miles away, was an every-day affair, while as a matter of fact many years had elapsed since unaccompanied he set foot in the city. He did not kiss her. Many very good men never kiss their wives. But small blame attaches to the elder for his omission on this occasion, since his wife had long ago discouraged all amorous demonstrations on the part of her liege lord, and at this particular moment was filling the parting moments with a rattling list of directions concerning thread, buttons, hooks, needles, and all the many etceteras of an industrious housewife's basket. The elder was laboriously assorting these postscript commissions in his memory, well knowing that to return with any one of them neglected would cause trouble in the family circle.

He mounted his patient steed that stood sleepily motionless in the warm sunlight, with his great

pointed ears displayed to the right and left, as though their owner had grown tired of the life burden their weight inflicted upon him, and was, old soldier fashion, ready to forego the once rigid alertness of early training for the pleasures of frequent rest on arms.

"And, Elder, don't you forgit them caliker scraps, or you 'll be wantin' kiver soon an' no kiver will be a-comin'."

Elder Brown did not turn his head, but merely let the whip hand, which had been checked in its backward motion, fall as he answered mechanically. The beast he bestrode responded with a rapid whisking of its tail and a great show of effort, as it ambled off down the sandy road, the rider's long legs seeming now and then to touch the ground.

But as the zigzag panels of the rail fence crept behind him, and he felt the freedom of the morning beginning to act upon his well-trained blood, the mechanical manner of the old man's mind gave place to a mild exuberance. A weight seemed to be lifting from it ounce by ounce as the fence panels, the weedy corners, the persimmon sprouts, and sassafras bushes crept away behind him, so that by the time a mile lay between him and the life partner of his joys and sorrows he was in a reasonably contented frame of mind, and still improving.

It was a queer figure that crept along the road that

cheery May morning. It was tall and gaunt, and had been for thirty years or more. The long head, bald on top, covered behind with iron-gray hair, and in front with a short tangled growth that curled and kinked in every direction, was surmounted by an old-fashioned stove-pipe hat, worn and stained, but eminently impressive. An old-fashioned Henry Clay cloth coat, stained and threadbare, divided itself impartially over the donkey's back and dangled on his sides. This was all that remained of the elder's wedding suit of forty years ago. Only constant care, and use of late years limited to extra occasions, had preserved it so long. The trousers had soon parted company with their friends. The substitutes were red jeans, which, while they did not well match his court costume, were better able to withstand the old man's abuse, for if, in addition to his frequent religious excursions astride his beast, there ever was a man who was fond of sitting down with his feet higher than his head, it was this self-same Elder Brown.

The morning expanded, and the old man expanded with it; for, while a vigorous leader in his church, the elder at home was, it must be admitted, an uncomplaining slave. To the intense astonishment of the beast he rode, there came new vigor into the whacks which fell upon his flanks; and the beast allowed astonishment to surprise him into real life and

decided motion. Somewhere in the elder's expanding soul a tune had begun to ring. Possibly he took up the far faint tune that came from the straggling gang of negroes away off in the field, as they slowly chopped amid the thread-like rows of cotton plants which lined the level ground, for the melody he hummed softly and then sang strongly, in the quavering, catchy tones of a good old country churchman, was, "I 'm glad salvation 's free."

It was during the singing of this hymn that Elder Brown's regular motion-inspiring strokes were for the first time varied. He began to hold his hickory up at certain pauses in the melody, and beat the changes upon the sides of his astonished steed. The chorus under this arrangement was,

"I 'm *glad* salvation 's *free*,
I 'm *glad* salvation 's *free*,
I 'm *glad* salvation 's *free* for *all*,
I 'm *glad* salvation 's *free*."

Wherever there is an italic, the hickory descended. It fell about as regularly and after the fashion of the stick beating upon the bass drum during a funeral march. But the beast, although convinced that something serious was impending, did not consider a funeral march appropriate for the occasion. He protested, at first, with vigorous whiskings of his tail and a rapid shifting of his ears. Finding these demonstrations unavailing, and convinced that some ur-

gent cause for hurry had suddenly invaded the elder's serenity as it had his own, he began to cover the ground with frantic leaps that would have surprised his owner could he have realized what was going on. But Elder Brown's eyes were half closed, and he was singing at the top of his voice. Lost in a trance of divine exaltation, for he felt the effects of the invigorating motion, bent only on making the air ring with the lines which he dimly imagined were drawing upon him the eyes of the whole female congregation, he was supremely unconscious that his beast was hurrying. And thus the excursion proceeded, until suddenly a shote, surprised in his calm search for roots in a fence corner, darted into the road, and stood for an instant gazing upon the new-comers with that idiotic stare which only a pig can imitate. The sudden appearance of this unlooked-for apparition acted strongly upon the donkey. With one supreme effort he collected himself into a motionless mass of matter, bracing his front legs wide apart; that is to say, he stopped short. There he stood, returning the pig's idiotic stare with an interest which must have led to the presumption that never before in all his varied life had he seen such a singular little creature. End over end went the man of prayer, finally bringing up full length in the sand, striking just as he should have shouted "free" for the fourth time in his glorious chorus.

Fully convinced that his alarm had been well founded, the shote sped out from under the gigantic missile hurled at him by the donkey, and scampered down the road, turning first one ear and then the other to detect any sounds of pursuit. The donkey, also convinced that the object before which he had halted was supernatural, started back violently upon seeing it apparently turn to a man. But seeing that it had turned to nothing but a man, he wandered up into the deserted fence corner, and began to nibble refreshment from a scrub oak.

For a moment the elder gazed up into the sky, half impressed with the idea that the camp-meeting platform had given way. But the truth forced its way to the front in his disordered understanding at last, and with painful dignity he staggered into an upright position, and regained his beaver. He was shocked again. Never before in all the long years it had served him had he seen it in such shape. The truth is, Elder Brown had never before tried to stand on his head in it. As calmly as possible he began to straighten it out, caring but little for the dust upon his garments. The beaver was his special crown of dignity. To lose it was to be reduced to a level with the common wool-hat herd. He did his best, pulling, pressing, and pushing, but the hat did not look natural when he had finished. It seemed to have been laid off into counties, sections, and town-lots. Like

a well-cut jewel, it had a face for him, view it from whatever point he chose, a quality which so impressed him that a lump gathered in his throat, and his eyes winked vigorously.

Elder Brown was not, however, a man for tears. He was a man of action. The sudden vision which met his wandering gaze, the donkey calmly chewing scrub buds, with the green juice already oozing from the corners of his frothy mouth, acted upon him like magic. He was, after all, only human, and when he got hands upon a piece of brush, he thrashed the poor beast until it seemed as though even its already half-tanned hide would be eternally ruined. Thoroughly exhausted at last, he wearily straddled his saddle, and with his chin upon his breast resumed the early morning tenor of his way.

II.

"GOOD-MORNIN', sir."

Elder Brown leaned over the little pine picket which divided the book-keepers' department of a Macon warehouse from the room in general, and surveyed the well-dressed back of a gentleman who was busily figuring at a desk within. The apartment was carpetless, and the dust of a decade lay deep on the old books, shelves, and the familiar advertisements of guano and fertilizers which decorated the room. An old stove, rusty with the nicotine contributed by farmers during the previous season while waiting by its glowing sides for their cotton to be sold, stood straight up in a bed of sand, and festoons of cobwebs clung to the upper sashes of the murky windows. The lower sash of one window had been raised, and in the yard without, nearly an acre in extent, lay a few bales of cotton, with jagged holes in their ends, just as the sampler had left them. Elder Brown had time to notice all these familiar points, for the figure at the desk kept serenely at its task, and deigned no reply.

"Good-mornin', sir," said Elder Brown again, in his most dignified tones. "Is Mr. Thomas in?"

"Good-morning, sir," said the figure. "I 'll wait on you in a minute." The minute passed, and four more joined it. Then the desk man turned.

"Well, sir, what can I do for you?"

The elder was not in the best of humor when he arrived, and his state of mind had not improved. He waited full a minute as he surveyed the man of business.

"I thought I mout be able to make some arrangements with you to git some money, but I reckon I was mistaken." The warehouseman came nearer.

"This is Mr. Brown, I believe. I did not recognize you at once. You are not in often to see us."

"No; my wife usually 'tends to the town bizness, while I run the church and farm. Got a fall from my donkey this morning," he said, noticing a quizzical, interrogating look upon the face before him, "and fell squar' on the hat." He made a pretense of smoothing it. The man of business had already lost interest.

"How much money will you want, Mr. Brown?"

"Well, about seven hundred dollars," said the elder, replacing his hat, and turning a furtive look upon the warehouseman. The other was tapping with his pencil upon the little shelf lying across the rail.

"I can get you five hundred."

"But I oughter have seven."

"Can't arrange for that amount. Wait till later in

the season, and come again. Money is very tight now. How much cotton will you raise?"

"Well, I count on a hundr'd bales. An' you can't git the sev'n hundr'd dollars?"

"Like to oblige you, but can't right now; will fix it for you later on."

"Well," said the elder, slowly, "fix up the papers for five, an' I 'll make it go as far as possible."

The papers were drawn. A note was made out for $552.50, for the interest was at one and a half per cent. for seven months, and a mortgage on ten mules belonging to the elder was drawn and signed. The elder then promised to send his cotton to the warehouse to be sold in the fall, and with a curt "Anything else?" and a "Thankee, that 's all," the two parted.

Elder Brown now made an effort to recall the supplemental commissions shouted to him upon his departure, intending to execute them first, and then take his written list item by item. His mental resolves had just reached this point when a new thought made itself known. Passers-by were puzzled to see the old man suddenly snatch his head-piece off and peer with an intent and awe-struck air into its irregular cavern. Some of them were shocked when he suddenly and vigorously ejaculated,

"Hannah-Maria-Jemimy! goldarn an' blue blazes!"

He had suddenly remembered having placed his memoranda in that hat, and as he studied its empty

depths his mind pictured the important scrap fluttering along the sandy scene of his early-morning tumble. It was this that caused him to graze an oath with less margin than he had allowed himself in twenty years. What would the old lady say?

Alas! Elder Brown knew too well. What she would not say was what puzzled him. But as he stood bare-headed in the sunlight a sense of utter desolation came and dwelt with him. His eye rested upon sleeping Balaam anchored to a post in the street, and so, as he recalled the treachery that lay at the base of all his affliction, gloom was added to the desolation.

To turn back and search for the lost paper would have been worse than useless. Only one course was open to him, and at it went the leader of his people. He called at the grocery; he invaded the recesses of the dry-goods establishments; he ransacked the hardware stores; and wherever he went he made life a burden for the clerks, overhauling show-cases and pulling down whole shelves of stock. Occasionally an item of his memoranda would come to light, and thrusting his hand into his capacious pocket, where lay the proceeds of his check, he would pay for it on the spot, and insist on having it rolled up. To the suggestion of the slave whom he had in charge for the time being, that the articles be laid aside until he had finished, he would not listen.

"Now you look here, sonny," he said, in the dry-goods store; "I'm conducting this revival, an' I don't need no help in my line. Just you tie them stockin's up an' lemme have 'em. Then I *know* I 've *got* 'em." As each purchase was promptly paid for, and change had to be secured, the clerk earned his salary for that day at least.

So it was when, near the heat of the day, the good man arrived at the drug-store, the last and only unvisited division of trade, he made his appearance equipped with half a hundred packages, which nestled in his arms and bulged out about the sections of his clothing that boasted of pockets. As he deposited his deck-load upon the counter, great drops of perspiration rolled down his face and over his water-logged collar to the floor.

There was a something exquisitely refreshing in the great glasses of foaming soda that a spruce young man was drawing from a marble fountain, above which half a dozen polar bears in an ambitious print were disporting themselves. There came a break in the run of customers, and the spruce young man, having swept the foam from the marble, dexterously lifted a glass from the revolving rack which had rinsed it with a fierce little stream of water, and asked mechanically, as he caught the intense look of the perspiring elder, "What schrup, sir?"

Now it had not occurred to the elder to drink soda,

but the suggestion, coming as it did in his exhausted state, was overpowering. He drew near awkwardly, put on his glasses, and examined the list of syrups with great care. The young man, being for the moment at leisure, surveyed critically the gaunt figure, the faded bandana, the antique claw-hammer coat, and the battered stove-pipe hat, with a gradually relaxing countenance. He even called the prescription clerk's attention by a cough and a quick jerk of the thumb. The prescription clerk smiled feebly, and continued his assaults upon a piece of blue mass.

"I reckon," said the elder, resting his hands upon his knees and bending down to the list, "you may gimme sassprilla an' a little strawberry. Sassprilla 's good for the blood this time er year, an' strawberry 's good any time."

The spruce young man let the syrup stream into the glass as he smiled affably. Thinking, perhaps, to draw out the odd character, he ventured upon a jest himself, repeating a pun invented by the man who made the first soda fountain. With a sweep of his arm he cleared away the swarm of insects as he remarked, "People who like a fly in theirs are easily accommodated."

It was from sheer good-nature only that Elder Brown replied, with his usual broad social smile, "Well, a fly now an' then don't hurt nobody."

Now if there is anybody in the world who prides

himself on knowing a thing or two, it is the spruce young man who presides over a soda fountain. This particular young gentleman did not even deem a reply necessary. He vanished an instant, and when he returned a close observer might have seen that the mixture in the glass he bore had slightly changed color and increased in quantity. But the elder saw only the whizzing stream of water dart into its center, and the rosy foam rise and tremble on the glass's rim. The next instant he was holding his breath and sipping the cooling drink.

As Elder Brown paid his small score he was at peace with the world. I firmly believe that when he had finished his trading, and the little blue-stringed packages had been stored away, could the poor donkey have made his appearance at the door, and gazed with his meek, fawn-like eyes into his master's, he would have obtained full and free forgiveness.

Elder Brown paused at the door as he was about to leave. A rosy-cheeked school-girl was just lifting a creamy mixture to her lips before the fountain. It was a pretty picture, and he turned back, resolved to indulge in one more glass of the delightful beverage before beginning his long ride homeward.

"Fix it up again, sonny," he said, renewing his broad, confiding smile, as the spruce young man poised a glass inquiringly. The living automaton went through the same motions as before, and again Elder Brown quaffed the fatal mixture.

What a singular power is habit! Up to this time Elder Brown had been entirely innocent of transgression, but, with the old alcoholic fire in his veins, twenty years dropped from his shoulders, and a feeling came over him familiar to every man who has been "in his cups." As a matter of fact, the elder would have been a confirmed drunkard twenty years before had his wife been less strong-minded. She took the reins into her own hands when she found that his business and strong drink did not mix well, worked him into the church, and sustained his resolutions by making it difficult and dangerous for him to get to his toddy. She became the business head of the family, and he the spiritual. Only at rare intervals did he ever "backslide" during the twenty years of the new era, and Mrs. Brown herself used to say that the "sugar in his'n turned to gall before the backslide ended." People who knew her never doubted it.

But Elder Brown's sin during the remainder of the day contained an element of responsibility. As he moved majestically down toward where Balaam slept in the sunlight he felt no fatigue. There was a glow upon his cheek-bones, and a faint tinge upon his prominent nose. He nodded familiarly to people as he met them, and saw not the look of amusement which succeeded astonishment upon the various faces. When he reached the neighborhood of Balaam it suddenly occurred to him that he might have forgotten

some one of his numerous commissions, and he paused to think. Then a brilliant idea rose in his mind. He would forestall blame and disarm anger with kindness — he would purchase Hannah a bonnet.

What woman's heart ever failed to soften at sight of a new bonnet?

As I have stated, the elder was a man of action. He entered a store near at hand.

"Good-morning," said an affable gentleman with a Hebrew countenance, approaching.

"Good-mornin', good-mornin'," said the elder, piling his bundles on the counter. "I hope you are well?" Elder Brown extended his hand fervidly.

"Quite well, I thank you. What ——"

"And the little wife?" said Elder Brown, affectionately retaining the Jew's hand.

"Quite well, sir."

"And the little ones — quite well, I hope, too?"

"Yes, sir; all well, thank you. Something I can do for you?"

The affable merchant was trying to recall his customer's name.

"Not now, not now, thankee. If you please to let my bundle stay untell I come back ——"

"Can't I show you something? Hat, coat ——"

"Not now. Be back bimeby."

Was it chance or fate that brought Elder Brown in front of a bar? The glasses shone bright upon the

shelves as the swinging door flapped back to let out a coatless clerk, who passed him with a rush, chewing upon a farewell mouthful of brown-bread and bologna. Elder Brown beheld for an instant the familiar scene within. The screws of his resolution had been loosened. At sight of the glistening bar the whole moral structure of twenty years came tumbling down. Mechanically he entered the saloon, and laid a silver quarter down as he said:

"A little whisky an' sugar." The arms of the bartender worked like a fakir's in a side-show as he set out the glass with its little quota of "short sweetening" and a cut-glass decanter, and sent a half-tumbler of water spinning along from the upper end of the bar with a dime in change.

"Whisky is higher 'n it used to be," said Elder Brown; but the bartender was taking another order, and did not hear him. Elder Brown stirred away the sugar, and let a steady stream of red liquid flow into the glass. He swallowed the drink as unconcernedly as though his morning tod had never been suspended, and pocketed the change. "But it ain't any better than it was," he concluded, as he passed out. He did not even seem to realize that he had done anything extraordinary.

There was a millinery store up the street, and thither with uncertain step he wended his way, feeling a little more elate, and altogether sociable. A

II.

"GOOD-MORNIN', sir."

Elder Brown leaned over the little pine picket which divided the book-keepers' department of a Macon warehouse from the room in general, and surveyed the well-dressed back of a gentleman who was busily figuring at a desk within. The apartment was carpetless, and the dust of a decade lay deep on the old books, shelves, and the familiar advertisements of guano and fertilizers which decorated the room. An old stove, rusty with the nicotine contributed by farmers during the previous season while waiting by its glowing sides for their cotton to be sold, stood straight up in a bed of sand, and festoons of cobwebs clung to the upper sashes of the murky windows. The lower sash of one window had been raised, and in the yard without, nearly an acre in extent, lay a few bales of cotton, with jagged holes in their ends, just as the sampler had left them. Elder Brown had time to notice all these familiar points, for the figure at the desk kept serenely at its task, and deigned no reply.

"Good-mornin', sir," said Elder Brown again, in his most dignified tones. "Is Mr. Thomas in?"

"Good-morning, sir," said the figure. "I 'll wait on you in a minute." The minute passed, and four more joined it. Then the desk man turned.

"Well, sir, what can I do for you?"

The elder was not in the best of humor when he arrived, and his state of mind had not improved. He waited full a minute as he surveyed the man of business.

"I thought I mout be able to make some arrangements with you to git some money, but I reckon I was mistaken." The warehouseman came nearer.

"This is Mr. Brown, I believe. I did not recognize you at once. You are not in often to see us."

"No; my wife usually 'tends to the town bizness, while I run the church and farm. Got a fall from my donkey this morning," he said, noticing a quizzical, interrogating look upon the face before him, "and fell squar' on the hat." He made a pretense of smoothing it. The man of business had already lost interest.

"How much money will you want, Mr. Brown?"

"Well, about seven hundred dollars," said the elder, replacing his hat, and turning a furtive look upon the warehouseman. The other was tapping with his pencil upon the little shelf lying across the rail.

"I can get you five hundred."

"But I oughter have seven."

"Can't arrange for that amount. Wait till later in

the season, and come again. Money is very tight now. How much cotton will you raise?"

"Well, I count on a hundr'd bales. An' you can't git the sev'n hundr'd dollars?"

"Like to oblige you, but can't right now; will fix it for you later on."

"Well," said the elder, slowly, "fix up the papers for five, an' I 'll make it go as far as possible."

The papers were drawn. A note was made out for $552.50, for the interest was at one and a half per cent. for seven months, and a mortgage on ten mules belonging to the elder was drawn and signed. The elder then promised to send his cotton to the warehouse to be sold in the fall, and with a curt "Anything else?" and a "Thankee, that 's all," the two parted.

Elder Brown now made an effort to recall the supplemental commissions shouted to him upon his departure, intending to execute them first, and then take his written list item by item. His mental resolves had just reached this point when a new thought made itself known. Passers-by were puzzled to see the old man suddenly snatch his head-piece off and peer with an intent and awe-struck air into its irregular cavern. Some of them were shocked when he suddenly and vigorously ejaculated,

"Hannah-Maria-Jemimy! goldarn an' blue blazes!"

He had suddenly remembered having placed his memoranda in that hat, and as he studied its empty

depths his mind pictured the important scrap fluttering along the sandy scene of his early-morning tumble. It was this that caused him to graze an oath with less margin than he had allowed himself in twenty years. What would the old lady say?

Alas! Elder Brown knew too well. What she would not say was what puzzled him. But as he stood bare-headed in the sunlight a sense of utter desolation came and dwelt with him. His eye rested upon sleeping Balaam anchored to a post in the street, and so, as he recalled the treachery that lay at the base of all his affliction, gloom was added to the desolation.

To turn back and search for the lost paper would have been worse than useless. Only one course was open to him, and at it went the leader of his people. He called at the grocery; he invaded the recesses of the dry-goods establishments; he ransacked the hardware stores; and wherever he went he made life a burden for the clerks, overhauling show-cases and pulling down whole shelves of stock. Occasionally an item of his memoranda would come to light, and thrusting his hand into his capacious pocket, where lay the proceeds of his check, he would pay for it on the spot, and insist on having it rolled up. To the suggestion of the slave whom he had in charge for the time being, that the articles be laid aside until he had finished, he would not listen.

"Now you look here, sonny," he said, in the dry-goods store; "I'm conducting this revival, an' I don't need no help in my line. Just you tie them stockin's up an' lemme have 'em. Then I *know* I 've *got* 'em." As each purchase was promptly paid for, and change had to be secured, the clerk earned his salary for that day at least.

So it was when, near the heat of the day, the good man arrived at the drug-store, the last and only unvisited division of trade, he made his appearance equipped with half a hundred packages, which nestled in his arms and bulged out about the sections of his clothing that boasted of pockets. As he deposited his deck-load upon the counter, great drops of perspiration rolled down his face and over his water-logged collar to the floor.

There was a something exquisitely refreshing in the great glasses of foaming soda that a spruce young man was drawing from a marble fountain, above which half a dozen polar bears in an ambitious print were disporting themselves. There came a break in the run of customers, and the spruce young man, having swept the foam from the marble, dexterously lifted a glass from the revolving rack which had rinsed it with a fierce little stream of water, and asked mechanically, as he caught the intense look of the perspiring elder, "What schrup, sir?"

Now it had not occurred to the elder to drink soda,

but the suggestion, coming as it did in his exhausted state, was overpowering. He drew near awkwardly, put on his glasses, and examined the list of syrups with great care. The young man, being for the moment at leisure, surveyed critically the gaunt figure, the faded bandana, the antique claw-hammer coat, and the battered stove-pipe hat, with a gradually relaxing countenance. He even called the prescription clerk's attention by a cough and a quick jerk of the thumb. The prescription clerk smiled feebly, and continued his assaults upon a piece of blue mass.

"I reckon," said the elder, resting his hands upon his knees and bending down to the list, "you may gimme sassprilla an' a little strawberry. Sassprilla 's good for the blood this time er year, an' strawberry 's good any time."

The spruce young man let the syrup stream into the glass as he smiled affably. Thinking, perhaps, to draw out the odd character, he ventured upon a jest himself, repeating a pun invented by the man who made the first soda fountain. With a sweep of his arm he cleared away the swarm of insects as he remarked, "People who like a fly in theirs are easily accommodated."

It was from sheer good-nature only that Elder Brown replied, with his usual broad social smile, "Well, a fly now an' then don't hurt nobody."

Now if there is anybody in the world who prides

which, with several others, he had beheld the brief but stirring scene.

"Put a saddle on er mule. The elder 's gwine back to town. And don't you be long about it nuther."

"Yessum." Aleck's ivories gleamed in the darkness as he disappeared.

Elder Brown was soberer at that moment than he had been for hours.

"Hannah, you don't mean it?"

"Yes, sir; I do. Back you go to town as sure as my name is Hannah Brown."

The elder was silent. He had never known his wife to relent on any occasion after she had affirmed her intention, supplemented with "as sure as my name is Hannah Brown." It was her way of swearing. No affidavit would have had half the claim upon her as that simple enunciation.

So back to town went Elder Brown, not in the order of the early morn, but silently, moodily, despairingly, surrounded by mental and actual gloom.

The old man had turned a last appealing glance upon the angry woman, as he mounted with Aleck's assistance, and sat in the light that streamed from out the kitchen window. She met the glance without a waver.

"She means it, as sure as my name is Elder Brown," he said thickly. Then he rode on.

IV.

To say that Elder Brown suffered on this long journey back to Macon would only mildly outline his experience. His early morning's fall had begun to make itself felt. He was sore and uncomfortable. Besides, his stomach was empty, and called for two meals it had missed for the first time in years.

When, sore and weary, the elder entered the city, the electric lights shone above it like jewels in a crown. The city slept; that is, the better portion of it did. Here and there, however, the lower lights flashed out into the night. Moodily the elder pursued his journey, and as he rode, far off in the night there rose and quivered a plaintive cry. Elder Brown smiled wearily; it was Balaam's appeal, and he recognized it. The animal he rode also recognized it, and replied, until the silence of the city was destroyed. The odd clamor and confusion drew from a saloon near by a group of noisy youngsters, who had been making a night of it. They surrounded Elder Brown as he began to transfer himself to the hungry beast to whose motion he was more accustomed, and in the "hail fellow well met" style of the day began to bandy jests upon his appearance. Now Elder Brown was not in a jesting

humor. Positively he was in the worst humor possible. The result was that before many minutes passed the old man was swinging several of the crowd by their collars, and breaking the peace of the city. A policeman approached, and but for the good-humored party, upon whom the elder's pluck had made a favorable impression, would have run the old man into the barracks. The crowd, however, drew him laughingly into the saloon and to the bar. The reaction was too much for his half-rallied senses. He yielded again. The reviving liquor passed his lips. Gloom vanished. He became one of the boys.

The company into which Elder Brown had fallen was what is known as "first-class." To such nothing is so captivating as an adventure out of the common run of accidents. The gaunt countryman, with his battered hat and claw-hammer coat, was a prize of an extraordinary nature. They drew him into a rear room, whose gilded frames and polished tables betrayed the character and purpose of the place, and plied him with wine until ten thousand lights danced about him. The fun increased. One youngster made a political speech from the top of the table; another impersonated Hamlet; and finally Elder Brown was lifted into a chair, and sang a camp-meeting song. This was rendered by him with startling effect. He stood upright, with his hat jauntily knocked to one side, and his coat-tails ornamented with a couple of

show-bills, kindly pinned on by his admirers. In his left hand he waved the stub of a cigar, and on his back was an admirable representation of Balaam's head, executed by some artist with billiard chalk.

As the elder sang his favorite hymn, "I 'm glad salvation 's free," his stentorian voice awoke the echoes. Most of the company rolled upon the floor in convulsions of laughter.

The exhibition came to a close by the chair overturning. Again Elder Brown fell into his beloved hat. He arose and shouted: "Whoa, Balaam!" Again he seized the nearest weapon, and sought satisfaction. The young gentleman with political sentiments was knocked under the table, and Hamlet only escaped injury by beating the infuriated elder into the street.

What next? Well, I hardly know. How the elder found Balaam is a mystery yet: not that Balaam was hard to find, but that the old man was in no condition to find anything. Still he did, and climbing laboriously into the saddle, he held on stupidly while the hungry beast struck out for home.

V.

HANNAH BROWN did not sleep that night. Sleep would not come. Hour after hour passed, and her wrath refused to be quelled. She tried every conceivable method, but time hung heavily. It was not quite peep of day, however, when she laid her well-worn family Bible aside. It had been her mother's, and, amid all the anxieties and tribulations incident to the life of a woman who had free negroes and a miserable husband to manage, it had been her mainstay and comfort. She had frequently read it in anger, page after page, without knowing what was contained in the lines. But eventually the words became intelligible and took meaning. She wrested consolation from it by mere force of will.

And so on this occasion when she closed the book the fierce anger was gone.

She was not a hard woman naturally. Fate had brought her conditions which covered up the woman heart within her, but, though it lay deep, it was there still. As she sat with folded hands her eyes fell upon — what?

The pink bonnet with the blue plume!

It may appear strange to those who do not understand such natures, but to me her next action was perfectly natural. She burst into a convulsive laugh; then seizing the queer object, bent her face upon it and sobbed hysterically. When the storm was over, very tenderly she laid the gift aside, and bare-headed passed out into the night.

For a half-hour she stood at the end of the lane, and then hungry Balaam and his master hove in sight. Reaching out her hand, she checked the beast.

"William," said she, very gently, "where is the mule?"

The elder had been asleep. He woke and gazed upon her blankly.

"What mule, Hannah?"

"The mule you rode to town."

For one full minute the elder studied her face. Then it burst from his lips:

"Well, bless me! if I did n't bring Balaam and forgit the mule!"

The woman laughed till her eyes ran water.

"William," said she, "you 're drunk."

"Hannah," said he, meekly, "I know it. The truth is, Hannah, I——"

"Never mind now, William," she said, gently. "You are tired and hungry. Come into the house, husband."

Leading Balaam, she disappeared down the lane; and when, a few minutes later, Hannah Brown and her husband entered through the light that streamed out of the open door, her arms were around him and her face upturned to his.

AN IDYL OF "SINKIN' MOUNT'IN."

I.

EZEKIEL OBADIAH SYKES leaned over the tumble-down split-picket fence that had once kept the pigs and chickens from his mother's humble flower-garden, and gazed fixedly at the mountain before him. His was not a striking figure, being lank and somewhat round-shouldered. It was not even picturesque. A pair of worn jean trousers covered his lower limbs, and were held in place by knit "galluses," which crossed the back of his cotton shirt exactly in the middle and disappeared over his shoulders in well-defined grooves. A stained and battered wool hat hung like a bell over his head, which rested by his chin upon a red, rough hand. The face was half covered by a reddish brown beard, the first of his budding manhood. The sun had just sunk beyond the mountain, and the great shadow that crept across the single field of starving corn and the tobacco patch deepened into twilight, and still the

young man rested on the picket-fence. Occasionally he would eject into the half-defined road, which came around one side of the mountain and disappeared around the other, a stream of tobacco-juice, and pensively watch it as it lined the gravel and vanished into the soil with something like a human gasp. Once he lifted a bare foot, and with a prolonged effort scratched with its horny toes the calf of the supporting leg. But by no motion did he dissipate the air of listlessness and despondency that hung about him.

Fortune had not smiled upon the Sykes family for many moons. There were no pigs to disturb the flower-garden overrun with prince's-feathers, bachelor's-buttons, four-o'clocks, old-maids, and sunflowers, and the dismounted gate leaned restfully against the post on which it had once hung. Somehow everything in the neighborhood of the Sykes cottage seemed inclined to lean towards something else. The cow was long gone, and the tiny little boarded shed, which straddled the sparkling spring-branch near at hand and served once as a dairy, was lurching towards the hillside. Near the staggering fence was a bench that had settled back against it, thrusting its legs well to the front, and there once nestled a score of bee-hives; but none remained, and only the great yellow and maroon butterflies that floated down the valley, and the bumblebees, reveled in the honey-flowers. Perhaps the influence of these facts weighed

upon the young man's mind, and cast a shadow darker than the mountain's. Certainly, as he leaned silently over the picket, he was in harmony with the surroundings.

A girl came out into the twilight of the little porch, where vines were clambering pell-mell up a rough trellis of peeled rods, and carefully poured water from a gourd into a dozen tiny pots along the edge. The pots consisted of gourds and of tin cans that had been brought home by Ezekiel from the refuse of the great hotels at The Falls, ten miles or more away. But they answered her purposes well, only they presented a somewhat incongruous appearance; for on several from which bloomed lovely geraniums — cuttings secured by Ezekiel from character-studying ladies at the same hotels — flamed great red tomatoes, and where little sprigs of coleus beamed in the shadow shone also phenomenal asparagus and the violent-hued lobster. The dress of the girl was a well-worn but neat-checked homespun, and at the throat was a bit of faded ribbon.

"D'rindy, yuh seen Ezekiel?" An elderly woman in homespun, of the same design as the girl's, stood in the doorway that led from the kitchen upon the porch, holding a coffee-pot in hand.

"No, ma'am. Zeke! Oh-h-h-h, Zeke!" The girl lifted her head and sung out the name until the mountain and the valley gave it back again and again.

"What yuh warnt, D'rindy?" The voice came from so close at hand in the gathering shadows as to startle her.

"Well, I d'clar' ter goodness' sakes, Ezekiel, what yuh doin' out thar?"

"Nuth'n'." The reply was low and careless.

"Come in an' git yuh vittuls."

"Don't warnt nuth'n', Ma. Yuh-all eat."

The woman looked out at the lone figure for a moment, then went in; and presently the girl thoughtfully followed. At the table, upon which was a pone of corn-bread, a pot of weak coffee, and a handless pitcher of molasses, the elder said:

"I 'm 'feered Ezekiel ar' ailin'. Las' night he would n' tech vittuls, an' hit ain't no better ter-night."

"Suthin' 's pesterin' 'im," Dorinda said simply; "er-pesterin' es mine." An old man sat next to her and shook his head.

"All liers, all liers!" he muttered. He was evidently very deaf, and there was not a hair on his head, which was sunken between his shoulders. "Thar warn't nair' still!" The women paid no attention to his mutterings, and presently, finishing his sop, he wiped his fingers upon his hips and shuffled into the corner of the fireplace, where he mumbled to himself awhile and then fell asleep.

"Yes, suthin' 's pesterin' 'im," said the old woman after a pause. "Ezekiel ain't like esse'f." The girl

rested her elbows on the table and watched her companion absently. Presently she said abruptly:

"Aun' Betsey, yuh reck'n Zeke hain't still er-frettin' 'bout Sal Boler gittin' j'ined ter 'er feller?"

"Maybe so; but I reck'n hard times got more ter do 'ith it. Ezekiel don't see no chance ahead now." She sighed, but added, as if to counteract its effect, "Not that I 'm distrustin'. Th' Lord 'll pervide: he allus pervides fur them as leans on 'im." Dorinda looked wistfully up into the face of her aging companion and was silent. Presently she rose and washed the few dishes, placing them upon their shelf. A few deft touches restored the room to its usual scrupulously neat condition. Returning the coffee-pot to the hearth again and the remaining bread to the spider for "Zeke," as she had always called him, in defiance of his mother's example, she went quietly to her little shed-room at the end of the porch and sat down to think. She was Dorinda Maddox, not Sykes, the daughter of a poor woman down the valley who died in the arms of Mrs. Sykes, five years before, leaving nothing she might call her own but this one lonely child. Her father and her brother had been killed in a fight with revenue officers, and the hairless, driveling old man within the kitchen had suffered two years of imprisonment; for the blood shed had not all been on one side. She had come into this household to share its increasing burdens and diminishing income, but not to eat

the bread of idleness. Never had mother a tenderer daughter; never an orphan a better mother. Zeke had been her one playmate and protector, and the little room, built when she grew older, was the result of his rough carpentry.

"I wunner ef he es er-frettin' 'bout Sal Boler gittin' j'ined?" she asked herself. The romance was familiar to her in all its parts from the day when Ezekiel was smitten until faithless Sal wedded a stranger from beyond the mountain, and he sunk back into despair and silence. She stood up before a little fragment of glass and looked at herself. It was a tiny room indeed, but marvelous in its appointments. The bare boards were frescoed with autumn leaves, their tints making a glory in the half-lit place. Clusters of chestnut-burrs garnished with them hung around, and here and there, in scraped cow-horns thrust into crevices, were tucked great bunches of ferns and scarlet berries and goldenrod. A half-dozen cheap prints cut from periodicals picked up at The Falls filled the waste places, and festoons of bead-corn linked them together. But just above her glass was a cheap photograph of Zeke, taken years before in the mountains by a straggling photographer whom he had guided, representing him, as he had seen the romantic tourists, posing in the shadow of a rock, his hat in one hand, and the other, for want of a coat,

Dorinda.

thrust into his half-open shirt-front — a barefooted mountain boy whose honest eyes looked straight into hers. This had been, from the day Ezekiel brought it home, the treasure of her girlhood. The frame about it was like none other in the world. It was of mica, made of sheets larger than any man's hand, and upon their surface with a needle she had traced ferns, butterflies, flowers, and leaves, rubbing soot into the lines to make the figures stand forth. This was her gem; and once a traveling artist who gazed upon it said that it was wonderfully true to nature, and offered to buy it. He might as well have bartered for her eyes. The little room held only her couch, a rude chest, a splint rocker, and a stool,— all Zeke's work,— a brown stone bowl, and a great jug-shaped gourd which served her for a pitcher.

As the girl stood in brown reverie before the fragment of glass she heard a horse approaching at a fox-trot, and presently a voice exclaim:

"Well, Ezekyel, how es time er-sarvin' you an' yourn?" She recognized the drawl of an old "hard-shell" preacher who at long intervals came to hold forth in the neighborhood. Then Ezekiel's voice:

"Po'ly, Parson. Light?"

"No; I 'm goin' ter lie at Sis' Toomer's ter-night. Will see yuh out ter Zebberlon come er-Sunday. Th' road hain't ther bes' an' hit 's er-gittin' dark —

whoa! Oh, Ezekyel,"—she heard the horse, which had started, checked again,—"seen Sal Boler 'cross the line las' month. Th' critter she war er-j'ined ter es dead." The girl in her little room clasped her hands and sunk back on the couch. She could but hear what followed.

"Yuh don't say!"

"Be'n dead fo' months come er-Friday. She ain't furgot you, Ezekyel." Here the speaker chuckled. "She do say that ef her life was ter come roun' ter be lived ergin, she 'd be Mistis Ezekyel Sykes down in Raccoon Holler."

"Did Sal say hit fur er fac', Parson?" His voice was low.

"She said hit fur er fac'; an' Sal hain't er-need'n' no man ter git vittuls fur *her*. The Lord he has blessed her more 'n many er prayin' ooman an' the mother er chillum, er rer, blessed be his holy name, er rer! An' I say it er-wonderin', not er-findin' fault. Yes, Sal 's got lan' an' stock; no eend er stock."

The girl heard his horse's footfalls echo out in the distance. She waited long. Then Ezekiel entered the kitchen, and she followed quietly and placed his bread upon the table. He passed into the only remaining room without noticing her.

"Ma," she heard him say quietly, as was his way, "git me up 'bout light. I 'm goin' ter th' yan side er

th' mount'in ter-morrer, an' maybe I won't git back afo' Sunday."

Dorinda turned and went out as silently as she came. In her room she threw herself face down upon the log-cabin quilt of her couch and sobbed herself asleep.

II.

WHEN Ezekiel Sykes arose next morning responsive to his mother's call, daylight was glimmering faintly on the mountain. He took from its pegs his red jean suit, the same that Sal Boler had so often seen him in, now a little worse for wear, and donned it, putting on his one other cotton shirt. Then he slicked his hair with marrow-fat from a horn, and throwing his boots, well greased, across his shoulder, rolled up his trousers. Prepared for his journey, he proceeded to the kitchen and possessed himself of a cup of cold coffee and the bread put aside for him. As he was passing out his mother came to the door.

"Fur ther Lor' sakes, Ezekiel, whar be yuh goin' ter, boy?"

"Ter the yan side o' the mount'in, Ma," he said quietly. Then he called to her from the outside: "I reck'n yer hain't ter see me afo' Sunday."

"Well, that beats my times," she said, gazing blankly at the open door. Presently she began to dress. "Sunday-meetin' clothes on, an' hit er Chuesday! Hit 's onpossible thet Ezekiel is settin' up ter er gal over thar——" She paused with her dress half over her head. "No, hit 's onpossible; one er Ezekiel's

"Zeke, less see how yer look."

queer notions. The boy war never jes' like yuther boys. Ter think," she said, laughing softly, "ter think of folks callin' *him* 'Doctor'—'Doctor Zeke'! But hit 's er fac' thet he do fech sum folks 'round estonishin'ly, an' thet 's erbout all any yuther doctor c'n say."

When Ezekiel Sykes took the road at early dawn he went northward; and as he strolled along he whistled softly. A great change had come over him. He carried himself erect, as in olden times, and smiled responsive to his thoughts. If Dorinda could have seen him then she would have said, "Hit 's Zeke come ter his own se'f ergin." The perfidy of Sal Boler had been a crushing blow a year before; he had suffered, and his pride had been altogether annihilated. From a self-laudatory young man he had sunk into a morose and thoughtfully distrustful one. If he had had the power of expression he might have become a cynic in words, as he was in fact. He had borne up pretty well under the waning fortunes of the Sykes family and the disasters which befell them all through the father; but Sal's conduct finished him at one fell blow.

"'Ef her life war ter come roun' ter be lived ergin, she 'd be Mistis Ezekyel Sykes down een Raccoon Holler,'" he said aloud; and then he laughed. It had been many a day since he had laughed like that, and he realized the change. "Zeke, less see how yuh look,"

he added jubilantly. He took a small bit of glass from his coat-pocket, thrust it behind the scale of a pine-tree's bark, and solemnly surveyed his countenance.

"Hit 's Zeke," he admitted, winking and twisting his head. "Zeke, Ezekiel Obadiah Sykes — Dr. Zeke. An' I reck'n she done a long sight worser 'n looks when she j'ined unto that Calliny feller, ef she did n't in lan' an' stock." He took off his hat and bowed to Ezekiel in the glass, and smiled at Ezekiel in the glass, and rolled his tongue at Ezekiel in the glass. "Ezekiel," said he finally, "ding yuh ole skin, ef I wuz ter meet yer on ther road I 'd say, 'Ther goes er feller fit ter run er gal crazy.' I would, fer er fac'. Yer ar' er bad un." He winked with both eyes violently. "No eend to lan' an' stock!"

With a loud guffaw he returned the reflector to his pocket, and whistling and singing by turns resumed his journey. The change that had come over him was marvelous.

Ezekiel had covered about fifteen miles, and was upon a better road when he was overtaken by a spanking team, driven by a good-natured, easy-going young man, who hailed him pleasantly.

"Ride, stranger?"

"In course," said Zeke; "an' glad ter get hit. How fur yuh travelin'?"

"Up about Red Creek."

"Well, now, thet 's what I calls luck," said Zeke, as he settled down on the proffered seat. "So 'm I."

The young man smiled at the speaker's general appearance and manner. His own shoes were on and blacked, and there was a well-bred business look about him that Ezekiel noticed.

"Be yuh er-stayin' thar?"

"Yes," said the stranger, looking at him keenly but slyly. "Where do you hail from?"

"Raccoon Holler."

"Farming?"

"Some, an' er-docterin' some."

"So! You are a doctor, then. Allopathic or homeopathic?"

Ezekiel reflected. "Mostly yarbs," he said.

His companion smiled again. "I see; one of nature's doctors. Best sort, after all."

Under this flattering admission Ezekiel expanded at once.

"Think so?"

"I do, indeed."

Ezekiel stretched out his hand. "Glad ter know yuh. What mout be your name?"

"Tom Summers."

"Dr. Ezekiel Obadiah Sykes," he said gravely.

"Glad to know you, Doc. It is lonesome up here; glad to have your company."

"'T is kinder lonesome," admitted Ezekiel. Then,

after a pause: "But, stranger, you kinder fetched me erwhile back when yuh war er-talkin' 'bout natur' and er-docterin' 'cordin' ter natur'."

"Indeed!"

"Thet 's my way. I hain't be'n ter school, an' what I got war picked up hyah 'n' thar f'om one 'n' ernuther. Folks got ter callin' me 'Dr. Zeke,' an' so hit goes; an' Dr. Zeke hit ar' till now; an' some er um 'u'd tell yuh thet Dr. Zeke knowed er thing er two, maybe, ef yer asked um."

"I have no doubt of it."

"Hit war the funniest thing th' way hit come er-bout — my er-gittin to be er natur's docter. I war er-workin' 'roun' on the mount'in er-huntin' fur arrer-root, an' I hearn a voice, as plain as I ar' hyarin' them horses' foots, er-sayin': 'Dr. Zeke, give natur' what natur' calls fur,' and I went right ter stud'in', day in an' day out, what hit meant. But one day Mistis Toomer, 'roun' th' mount'in, she come ter me an' says, says she, 'Dr. Zeke, the baby ar' mortul' sick, an' ar' continnerwally er-cryin' fur raw 'taters an' fried greens.'"

"And you gave them to her?"

"Quicker ner lightnin' hit come ter me what war meant 'bout natur' callin', an' I says, says I: 'Mahaly Toomer, ef the baby ar' mortul' sick an' ar' er-continnerwally cryin' fur raw 'taters an' fried greens, give her raw 'taters an' fried greens'; an' with thet

I warks off an' leaves 'er stan'in' in th' road like one seized uv er sperrit. Mahaly told our folks nex' day thet she laid out thet Dr. Zeke hed done gone plum crazy, but bimeby, er-knowin' my ways, she up an' give the chile hits 'taters an' fried greens."

"Death was instantaneous, I suppose?"

"Death! Why, ther chile ar' ter-day ther outstrappinest boy in Rabun County."

The stranger laughed.

"Well, that was wonderful, indeed. But, Doctor, seriously, what would you do if nature should call for something out of season?"

Dr. Zeke pursed up his lips, and, looking out across the mountains, scratched his chin.

"Natur'," he said presently, "hain't goin' ter call fur thet which natur' hain't got — thet is, ginerally. But hit do sometimes so happen thet way."

"Then comes practice by substitute." The stranger passed the reins while he went down into a leather case for cigars.

"No," said the doctor; "hit won't work thet er way. Now thar war Sis' Debory Jinkins, which word come es how she war seized with er longin' fur watermillion, when watermillions war long gone; an' I, knowin' thet gourds war somewhat arter th' make er th' watermillion,— sorter half kin on one side, anyhow,— had um fetch er green gourd, an' we put hit down Sis' Debory's throat, her ma er-

holdin' her, fur she did kick pow'ful, bein' natur'ly of a contrerry natur' an' havin' no longin' fur thet eend of the watermillion family. We put it down her throat——"

"I suppose it satisfied her longing for watermelon."

"Yes, hit satisfied her longin' fur most ev'ything fur erwhile; leastways, she never said nothin' more erbout watermillions; but Sis' Debory come nigh unter death with colic afo' mornin', an' sense thet time I hain't hed faith in substytoots. Ef natur' calls fur what natur' hain't got, I argy thet hit ain't Dr. Zeke thet 's ter blame; an' I ginerally waits ontel natur' calls fur suthin' ter hand."

Something like five miles had been covered during the exposition of the Sykes theory of medical practice, when Ezekiel suddenly changed the subject.

"Stranger, yuh ever hyar er th' Widder Martin — Sallie Boler thet war, up een Red Crick settlement?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed. Nice woman she is, too." The stranger spoke without hesitation. Ezekiel was silent for a full minute; then, unable to contain the secret any longer, he continued:

"Well, hit 's 'bleeged ter come out. I 'm er-courtin' th' same."

"Indeed? Bully boy, and good luck to you! Is she pretty well fixed?"

"Fixed?"

"Got any land — money?"

"Er whole county, an' no eend er stock."

"Go in, old fellow, and win!" said his companion impressively. "And you are really courting her?"

"Thet 's what er said. Ever meet her, stranger?"

"Oh, yes. The widow and I are good friends."

"Yuh don't say!"

"We are, indeed."

"Then, stranger, yuh stop erlong 'ith us ter-night. She 'll be pow'ful glad ter see 'er ole friend, an' anybody thet Ezekiel Sykes brings 'll be welcome ter the bes'."

For a full hour and a half Ezekiel held forth upon the subject that was consuming him, but when at length they reached a little branch he called "Whoa!" and the willing horses came to a halt.

"Stranger," said he, "will you hole up er minute tell I spruce er bit?"

"Why, certainly."

Ezekiel alighted from the buggy, and, washing his feet in the stream, wiped them upon the grass and drew on his boots. After this he stuck the little glass in a tree again, put on his coat, and producing a faded red cravat proceeded to tie it about his neck. Then he combed his well-oiled locks with his fingers.

"Thet 'll do fur th' widder," he said as he climbed back into the buggy.

The two journeyed along pleasantly until the sum-

mit of the ridge was reached and the opposite valley lay spread before them. Here the stranger, after a few minutes' reflection, said, his eyes twinkling:

"Dr. Sykes, perhaps I ought to have mentioned it before, but the fact is I married Widow Martin myself two weeks ago."

Ezekiel looked at him blankly for a full minute, then reached out and caught the lines, and with a slow steady pull brought the horses to a standstill. The stranger's face was as calm and impassive as a June sky.

"Yuh don' say!" he exclaimed in a hoarse whisper.

"Fact. But don't turn back on that account. Any friend of mine will be welcome at Sal's. Besides, she wants to see you, for I have heard her say so."

Ezekiel still surveyed him piteously. Then he slowly reached down and drew off first one and then the other boot. His cravat was returned to his pocket. Springing to the ground, he caught the line nearest him.

"Stranger," he said, "Widder Martin's new husbun's er-goin' ter get whupped! Oh, yuh need n' laugh!"

"Sykes," said his late companion, wiping the tears from his eyes and still shaking, "let go that line."

"I'm th' bes' man in Rabun County," said Ezekiel, dancing in the road. "Come down, come down!"

"You're the biggest fool!"

Ezekiel was fairly boiling with rage.

"Light, light!" he yelled. Then as the stranger made no motion to comply, Ezekiel began to kick the nearest horse in the stomach with all his might, and that animal responded by rearing and plunging violently. The stranger "lit." Unfortunately for Ezekiel, he was caught in the act of pulling off his coat. He was a doomed man from the outset. For about three minutes there was an animated spectacle in the road, and then Ezekiel fled from the spot, as was perfectly proper, since he could have accomplished nothing desirable by remaining, and the stranger was at white heat. Kicking the horse had upset his temper completely.

"Confound the fellow!" he said; "I've a great mind to carry off his boots and coat."

But he did not, and nature's physician regained them when the coasts were cleared, and, bleeding and dazed, took the back track. At the little branch he stuck his glass in the tree again and began an examination of himself. One eye was nearly closed, his lip was cut, and his nose was swollen. Minor injuries helped to make him the unhappiest of mortals. Long time he studied himself in silence. Presently he said, a great tear oozing from the blackened eye:

"Ef 'e had n' er got een that ar fust sub-binder unner thet ear, afo' I got out'n th' coat, Widder Martin's new husbun 'u'd er be'n in er worser fix 'n thet."

He checked the tears and examined himself critically. Finally he said more calmly: "Hit war done complete an' no mistake."

As he slowly and painfully resumed his journey homeward he added: "'Ef her life war ter come round ter be lived ergin, she 'd be Mistis Ezekyel Sykes down een Raccoon Holler,' she would!" He shook his head pitifully: "O Sal, Sal; my heart ar' plum broke!"

III.

"LAH sakes, Ezekiel, what ails yuh, boy?" Again the shadow of the great mountain was deepening over the little cottage, when, foot-sore, bruised, weary, and disconsolate, Ezekiel Sykes dragged himself in through the open gate and dropped his boots upon the floor of the porch, his coat beside them. His mother's salutation roused him, and he raised a quizzical face to hers — a face which surely only a mother could have recognized. A faint smile flittered among the few clearings upon it — a dim ghost of his old smile.

"Be'n ter th' yan side of the mount'in, Ma!" He sank upon the top step and rested his chin upon his hand. "An' I hain't er-torkin' much erbout hit ternight."

The woman checked her second exclamation. She was used to the young man's moods; and, besides, the results of the fist and skull fights were perfectly familiar to her in that rough country of green whisky and exciting elections. But for Ezekiel to come home in these piping days of peace bearing evidences of having figured on the losing side of a scrimmage was altogether novel.

"Ezekiel," she said, "tell yuh ma how hit come erbout?" Ezekiel ejected a stream of tobacco-juice from between his swollen lips, and wiped them gently with the back of his hand.

"Hit all come uv one sub-binder unner thet ar ear; hit war lammed when I war er-pullin' out er my coat an' my arm hit war stickin' ter the sleeve. Ef th' mount'in hitse'f hed er fell thar, hit 'u'd er be'n erbout ther size er thet ar lick. But, Ma, cook suthin' quick. Hit's be'n nigh onter two mortul days sence I eat. I did n't want nobody er-laughin' at Ezekiel Sykes, an' so I come honggry all ther way back."

"Why, sakes erlive, ther boy mus' be er-perishin'. Set right thar, Ezekiel, an' don't yuh move er peg tell I git er pone er bread an' er pot er coffee."

The good woman bustled off and disappeared. While this brief scene was enacting, Dorinda stood within the shadows of her little room, her fingers clasped and eyes set eagerly upon the pair. Her mother's form had but disappeared in the kitchen when she glided out and sank upon her knees at the young man's side, her hand upon his shoulder.

"O Zeke, Zeke!" she whispered, "lemme do suthin' fur yuh! Are yuh hurted bad, Zeke!"

He gazed at her with his one open eye a full minute before replying. The look was so comical, so utterly foreign to him, so pathetic withal, that she finally threw her head back and laughed until the val-

Zeke and Dorinda.

ley seemed to swarm with silvery echoes. Ezekiel blinked wisely at her.

"D'rindy," he said, "yuh better laugh fur two; I ain' ekil ter any ter-night."

And so she did. Her emotion, which was deeper than the occasion, ran off in laughter that approached the hysterical.

"O Zeke!" she gasped, "s'posen thet ar pictur' man hed er took yer ter-day!" Zeke's queer smile came out again, gamboled pitifully in the small clearings of his countenance, and went back with a suddenness that was grotesque. The girl was still holding her sides, but presently she wiped her eyes with her apron.

"O Zeke," she said. "I 'm so sorry! What kin I do fur yuh?"

"Natur' is er-callin' fur suthin' to go innards," he declared oracularly, "sech es Ma gits up; an' I reck'n as how natur' ought ter be callin' fur suthin' ter go outside. Git some water, D'rindy. Ef hit had n' er be'n fur thet ar leadin' sub-binder——" But the girl had glided into her room and caught up her crock. She sped out to the little rivulet, sparkling icy cold from the spring. Presently she came back with it full and placed it on the step.

"Now, Zeke," she said, "yuh jes' set down thar on th' nex' step an' lay yuh head in my lap—so! Now keep still." Her plump little hand cupped water

against the swollen places of his head, and as she bathed them thus the young man, soothed and quieted, ever and anon gazed up into her violet eyes and flushed face.

"I declar' ter goodness, D'rindy," he said, seeking for some way to express his gratitude, "yuh han' 's es sof' es er moss-patch, an' yuh es putty es th' sunset on th' mount'in."

"Shet yer jaw, Zeke; yer pokin' fun at me! An' yuh eyes can' see ter-night, nuther."

Still her heart beat fast and strong. It was the first compliment a man had ever paid to her looks. She might live out her lonely life unblessed here in the valley, and the horizon of her daily existence be the long blue peaks and her simple household duties; but the memory of the words that she had heard would dwell with her always. Her soul could thrive upon a crust that other women would spurn.

Silence fell upon them, the gliding water lapping the bruised face and lullabying the perturbed spirit, the soft hand of the girl weaving a spell for the wounded warrior. Long time they sat thus, and ever and anon his single eye sought the face above it. Something of wonder was stirring within him. Hers was a beautiful face; he had never known it before. He had seen it a thousand times; how was it that the fact had escaped him? "She ar' putty as ther sunset on ther mount'in," he assented dreamily, in-

dorsing his own compliment; "an' er dern sight puttier." The remaining orb blinked at her dreamily and closed beside its mate.

"What yuh sayin', Zeke?"

"I war er-sayin' er dern sight puttier; thet 's what I war er-sayin'," he answered faintly.

"Who?" she asked softly. Then presently she added, "Sal Boler?" One of Ezekiel's eyes opened wide; the other struggled in vain beneath its thick blue curtain.

"Who said Sal Boler?"

She turned her face away and fixed her gaze upon the distant peaks. Her reply was just audible and full of pathos:

"Yuh went thar, Zeke. I did n' mean ter hyah hit, but th' parson talked so loud. War she trooly a widder, Zeke, an'— an'— did she trooly wanter come an' be — Mistis Ezekiel Sykes down een Raccoon Holler?"

It was out at last; and the sentence seemed to end almost in a moan. One tear fell down from above him, but it splashed only the little hand that soothed his wounds.

"D'rindy," he answered after a long silence, "I had er mind ter keep my jaw shet, but hit hain't no use now. An' I don't care noway. D'rindy, Sal Boler hes done j'ined ter er city feller, an' hit war him what shet thet ar eye! Hit makes yuh jump, an' hit made

me jump too, at fust. D'rindy, ef any man hed er said ter me yestiddy mornin' when I went out er thet gate, 'Ezekiel Sykes, Sal Boler is j'ined ter er city feller, an' th' city feller is goin' ter lick yuh afo' night,' I 'd er said he war er dinged fool ef no worser, an' ter es face. But them ar is ther two things hes come erbout. An I mus' say, thet while I don' think no better er Sal Boler, but on the contrarywise do set her down fer er huzzy, hit mus' be 'lowed thet thar es suthin' more in city fellers 'n I most ginerally have let on; only hit ain't er fair fight ter open up 'ith sub-binders on the ear when er man is hung een his coat-sleeve."

"An' did yuh see 'er, Zeke?"

"No. I seed whar she war said ter be er-livin', an' then me an' the city feller thet had gimme a lift got ter jawin', an' hit come out thet Sal Boler was done j'ined unter him two weeks or more. One word started ernuther," he added, "an' ernuther started ther sub-binder."

Ezekiel was expanding under the humane treatment, and could afford even to indulge in pleasantry.

Mrs. Sykes dissipated the charm that had been woven about them by appearing suddenly with a great quantity, though limited variety, of the physic that "natur'" had called for in behalf of Ezekiel, and to which the patient took kindly, not to say greedily. Dorinda watched him eat with a vague unrest in her

heart. There is nothing at any time attractive to a woman in the sight of a hungry man at his meals. But when Ezekiel went in to lie down upon his mother's bed, as he used to when a boy when tired or troubled,—and was he not still her boy?—the deserted girl stood up gazing on the mountains veiled in their violet mists into which the blue sky of the ending day was melting, their depths shot with roseate rays. The scene was miniatured in her shadowy eyes, where a softer light was beaming.

"He 's come back free, an' he said my han' war soft es er patch er moss, an' I war es putty es the sunset on th' mount'ins: he said hit!" Her eyelids drooped over their orbs, and her chin sunk upon her breast. Then, starting as from a dream, she followed into the house.

That night, when Dorinda lay dreaming in the little shed-room so full of her own life, there came down the valley a deep, booming, roaring volume of sound, and the house trembled responsive to its vibrations. Nearer it approached, and her room was filled with the fierce light of an electric flash which seemed to explode there. Blinded, stunned, terrified, she groped toward the door and lifted the latch. She was almost thrown down by the storm that burst in upon her. The air seemed full of timbers, stones, and flying drift, and the thunder was as the thunder of the waters that come down at Tallulah when the

river is full. Her voice when she called was beaten back as a feather in her throat. The timbers of the little room seemed about to fly apart. Gasping with fear, unable to close the door against the mighty blast, she gave herself up for lost. With her limbs benumbed, she tottered and fell. There, as she lay awaiting death, a man came and in the screaming fury of the storm lifted her in his arms. There was a moment in which the deluge splashed her face and the next instant she was drawn into the warm kitchen. She saw by the tremulous light of the mysterious flame the half-blackened face of Ezekiel bent above her, and faintly as one calling afar off heard his mother's voice:

> "He holds th' thunder een es han'
> An' rides upon th' storm,"

just as the parson used to line it out at Zebulon. Then came darkness.

When Dorinda gained consciousness her adopted mother was bathing her face; they were alone, Ezekiel having withdrawn at her command. The storm was now at its height, and the room was full of the sudden and fearful blazes. Dorinda struggled to her feet again. Her lips moved rapidly, but all sound was lost in the din of the battle waged about them. Suddenly she broke from the elder woman's clasp and rushed to the porch. For an instant her mother thought that, crazed with fear, she had

thrown herself into the storm, but in the next back came the girl through the furious elements, drenched, and with her hair blown wildly over her half-nude shoulders. The lightning trembled over and seemed to lick her form from head to foot, and by the sheen of its liquid, wavy flame she saw that the girl's hand clinched the little photograph of Ezekiel, torn from its frame of mica, while her face in its beautiful triumph seemed almost glorified. The secret was written there.

"D'rindy, D'rindy, child!" she cried. "Why hain't yuh tole me afo'?"

The words, screamed as they were in the night from the heart of the woman, did not reach the girl, who covered up the little picture in her chilled bosom, and crouched shivering by the smoldering fire. Her companion gazed upon her piteously, then kneeled beside her, and, pointing upward, moved her lips. Dorinda understood, and followed her example. Still raged the storm; such an one had never before burst upon Raccoon Hollow. Suddenly there was a noise as though the mountain itself had been riven asunder, and the house shook until the crockery danced upon the shelves. Then all grew still. Rising to her feet, the elder woman drew the shivering girl to the bed where the old man, deaf to the storm and oblivious of life, slept the sleep of second childhood, wrapped a blanket about her and thrust her under cover.

"Ma," she moaned, and the word sounded as it did

when on that sad day years ago the kind-hearted woman received her as a charge — "Ma, kiss me onct, please"; just the appeal made to the dead that lay unresponsive to its frightened offspring. It was the first time that she had used it since. With tears streaming from her eyes the woman bent and kissed her thrice, and her lips when she rose were wet with the tears of the girl.

"An' him er-lovin' nobody but ole Tom Boler's gal," she said. "Hit 's more 'n I kin make out."

IV.

In the morning, when Ezekiel looked forth from the doorway, an appalling spectacle met his gaze. The mountain had actually split asunder, and one half had sunk far down below the other. So sharply was the line drawn that a great pine, yielding one-half its trunk to the departed, upreared the other with the firmer rock, its white riven heart blazing the hillside like a monument. Pale with astonishment, Ezekiel gazed long upon the scene, but there was something yet more appalling reserved for him — not a stalk of corn was left in the valley! His mother came to him, and was silent too in awe at the desolation apparent and the change in the familiar old mountain. "All gone, Ma, all gone!" he groaned. The lips of the pale woman trembled. She was wont to say that her faith was like the mountain, but was not the mountain split at last? Her hand rested upon him as it had, oh so many, many times when trouble oppressed them.

"Th' Lord 'll pervide, Ezekiel. He kep' us in the night, an' he kin keep us in th' day."

"I be'n hyarin' that, Ma, all these years, an' now look! Poorer 'n' poorer year een an' year out. Es fur me, I war whupped when Pa got inter troubl' 'ith

the law an' we had ter sell all ter pay out. Th' Lord maybe did pervide, but hit 's be'n mighty hard livin' sence."

"Hush, Ezekiel!" the woman whispered. "Hit 's blaspheemy! Leave hit erlone; th' righteous 'll never beg bread; leave hit erlone. Th' han' thet kin split mount'ins kin pervide fur hits own."

The light had come back to the weary face, and it was almost beautiful in its new faith as she turned humbly and went about her household duties. But Dorinda, watching her, thought that her step was feebler than she had ever seen it.

"Aun' Betsey," she said, putting her arm upon her shoulder, "don't yuh give up."

"Give up? No, deary; I ain't er-givin' up. But ef ther Lord hed er tuck us las' night, I would n' er lifted a finger ter hender him. Hit warn't his will, D'rindy, an' I 'm willin' ter wait."

It was a gloomy day for Raccoon Hollow. Ezekiel, under the lingering pains of his old misfortune and the new, wandered about disconsolate, and when morning dawned again the last of the Sykes' meal went into pones of bread.

The mystery of the mountain spread far and near. The day upon which the fortunes of the Sykes family seemed at their lowest ebb was signalized by the arrival of an excursion party from The Falls. Ten or twelve ladies and gentlemen on horseback and in vehicles

rode over to see the wonder, bringing a well-ordered lunch. They chattered over the catastrophe, climbed the mountain, and presently the ladies rendezvoused at the little house. Here the lunch was spread, and Dorinda brought water from the spring and rendered many little kindly services. After lunch the party swarmed unceremoniously over the premises, including Dorinda's little room, which delighted them as much, probably, as the mountain interested. Especial attention was devoted by the ladies to the delicate traceries upon the mica frame, to which Ezekiel's photograph had been carefully restored. A handsome, grave young gentleman was asked to examine it. He did so, and turning to Dorinda, whose cheeks flushed, perhaps by the praise already bestowed, asked:

"Where did that mica come from?"

"Well, now, is n't that just like Captain Moore!" exclaimed one of the ladies. "We were not talking about the mica, sir, but the tracings."

He smiled. "The tracings have great merit," he said; "but there is more money in mica that will split into such large clear sheets than in all the art that can be put upon it. You say that you found it near here?" This to Dorinda.

"Yes, sir."

"And will you go with me to see it in the morning, if I return?"

"Yes, sir, ef yuh wants me, an' th' mountain hain't sunk 'ith hit." The party began to prepare for departure. Presently there was a brief consultation among the gentlemen; then as some were galloping away one of them approached Mrs. Sykes and poured a handful of small silver into her hand. "For your kind attentions," he said. Before she comprehended he mounted and galloped away, leaving her speechless with surprise and emotion. Ezekiel came out of the wood where he had concealed his disfigurement all day, and there on the porch he and Dorinda found her sitting. Tears were running down her cheeks, and she made no effort to restrain them. She held out the hand blessed with so much silver.

"Ezekiel," she said, and then her eyes lifted upward and finished the sentence. He comprehended.

"Yes, Ma," he said gently, "yuh ar' right an' I ar' wrong, es ar' most commonly true." But the girl put her arms around her and kissed the wrinkled cheeks in silence.

Early the next day sensitive Ezekiel took to shelter again, for Captain Moore kept his promise. Ezekiel was hidden on the mountain, from which he beheld the gentleman and Dorinda pick their way across the rift to the far side. It was a difficult journey, and though the girl was as agile as a deer, Ezekiel noticed with a queer pain at his heart that the stranger insisted upon extending his hand to her every time occasion offered, and that it was always accepted.

"Look out above your bowlder, Ezekiel."

"Dad blast th' feller!" he said: "he 'd better git her ter help him, stidder him er-helpin' her."

The girl was in a particularly merry mood. Did she suspect that the single eye of the disfigured doctor was upon her? She was a woman, and the curious can argue the conclusion. Her laughter rang out across the rift, and he found himself angry and uncomfortable generally. Heigh-ho, Ezekiel Sykes! You cannot understand nature after all, can you? See that leap she has just made, her hair flying and poke-bonnet waving. How beautifully done! The gentleman does not follow — ah, but he does, and she beams upon his success. Look out above your bowlder, Ezekiel, with your one capable eye, and mutter "Dad blast him!" as much as you please; they are not concerned about you.

The mica was found more than ever uncovered by the slide; a wonderful seam it was, hemmed in by quartz. The gentleman said little, but was evidently deeply interested. Finally he ascertained, by casual questions, that the ownership was vested in Mrs. Sykes. But the next day he came again, and again the girl accompanied him. He was trying to follow the vein. And the history of one day was as the history of its predecessor, even down to Ezekiel.

But at last, standing over the mica, the captain and the girl held a long and earnest conversation. Ezekiel saw her give him her hand impulsively, and they came back, her face flushed, her eyes

sparkling. The truth, as it appeared to Ezekiel, was unmistakable, and he was full of rage when he saw the stranger depart and Dorinda wave her bonnet in response to a wave of his hat. But alas for Ezekiel; there was no time for questions. A second large party had come up from The Falls and swarmed over the place, and back into the friendly shadows of the mountain the young man carried his poulticed ear and picturesque scars. When this party left, the trustful and hospitable old lady was again blessed with coin.

So ran the summer away; but ere it had ended, the little home, or "Aunt Betsey's," as it had come to be known, became a regular rendezvous for visitors, who got there midday meals, bought strings of bead-corn, posies of gay flowers, and queer bits of quartz and mica with delicate traceries upon the latter. The cow and chickens had come back; the pigs, too, returned; yes, and the bee-hives. And everything about the yard straightened up, as with new life, from their leaning attitudes. From the rafters of the kitchen were hung yarns and provisions and shoes for the long winter, and scores of other articles for home use; and on the shelves were bolts of cloth, canned goods, and all the necessaries of life. Dorinda's gown was as nice as anybody's. The smile of God seemed to rest upon Raccoon Hollow and the riven mountain.

V.

How was it with Ezekiel? The clouds still hung low. The intuition of the young woman had placed her in possession of his secret before he knew that he had one, and with the perversity of her sex she turned the tables upon him. Her smiles were distributed among the tourists, and she learned to give keen answers to their good-humored banterings. Often he had tried to tell her of his misery, but with the training she had been receiving from the beaux and coquettes, he was no match for her. One day she went to him with a great secret.

"O Zeke!" she said, "I ar' er-goin' ter tell yuh suthin'. Th' parson war erlong ter-day, an' tickled nigh unter death. He do say hit 's all er joke erbout Sal Boler's gittin' j'ined to thet ar city feller, which war er drummer an' er-foolin' yuh. Th' parson say es how hit 's all over Calliny, an' folks es er-torkin erbout 'Zeke Sykes's los' widder'." She held her sides, and followed up the information with a most provoking spasm of mirth. Ezekiel gasped for breath. His voice was hoarse when he spoke at last.

"Th' parson tole yuh?"

"On course. He come straight from Sal's, an' she tole 'im 'ith her own mouth. Now yuh kin go back, an' Sal kin be 'Mistis Ezekiel Sykes down een Raccoon Holler.'" There was just the faintest tremor in her voice, but Ezekiel was beyond the comprehension of fine shadings then. She had expected an outburst; there was none. The young man walked off, and the signs were unmistakable; he was crushed.

"Zeke, are yuh hurted bad sure 'nough?" she called after him repentantly. He made no reply. When he came back later she was sitting on the steps.

"Ma," he said, "I 'm er-goin' ter Th' Falls, an' maybe I won't come back 'n er week; an' maybe hit 'll be two. They do say es how thar ar' more chance fur mount'in men in Alabam', an' I 'm er-gittin' sorter worrit down here. I 'll tork ter yuh when I 'm done torkin' ter them thet knows. Thar be some erbout Th' Falls now thet knows." He kissed her cheek, an odd caress for Ezekiel, and affected not to see her anxious look.

"Good-bye, D'rindy," he said, as he passed her on the steps. "New frien's es better 'n ole frien's." A great lump rose in the girl's throat; she could not speak. He passed through the gateway and took the road that led to The Falls, walking listlessly. She watched him for a moment, then rose and darted after him, her light step giving out scarcely a sound. If he heard, he made no sign. Presently she laid a hand

upon his shoulder, and then he turned and looked down into the violet eyes, while a trembling seized him.

"Zeke," she said, a little smile quivering upon her lips, "when yuh git ter Alabam' won't yuh write er letter?"

"One writes ter yuh now, an' one es ernough." He blurted the words out and drew from under her touch.

"O Zeke!" She looked at him with such reproach that he was half ashamed. Then she laughed, pointing her finger at him. "Zeke, I do berlieve yuh erslippin' off ter court Sal Boler ergin." She bent almost double with the idea.

"No, I be n't," he said hoarsely.

"Yuh ar', Zeke. Yuh ar'! An' O Zeke, ef yuh be, look out fur drummers on th' road!"

He turned and strode off without a word more. She leaned her back against a tree weak with laughing, her feet thrust out in front. Presently she called him.

"Zeke!" He turned and glared back at her in silence. "Zeke Sykes," she continued, "yuh ar' er bigger fool 'n I seen this year, an' thar 's be'n some big ones 'round hyar, th' Lord knows." Her face was flushed and she held out her arms. "Zeke, take me erlong ter Alabam', won't yuh?" He came back doubting, but the arms were not lowered, and into

them he walked, speechless with the change from despair to happiness. He held her a long time.

"D'rindy," he said, "an' yuh love me arter all?"

"Yes, an' afo' all—f'om th' fus' time when yuh used ter tote me on yuh back over ther rocks. O Zeke! I hain't never loved nobody else in th' whole worl' but yuh." Tears crept from under the half-closed eyelids, and then there was silence as he pressed her close to him.

"Well," said Ezekiel finally, "I war er fool mos' trooly."

. . . . . .

Two more incidents close the idyl of "Sinkin' Mount'in," as Zeke's sign-board at the fork of the roads has it. The captain's letters, spelled out with much labor, gave assurance of a sale of the mica deposit at a good price. This is one. The other is: In the closing hours of the season, Ezekiel, wandering about the hotels, met face to face the drummer who had made him a jest throughout one corner of Carolina. He spoke not a word, but kept his eye on the practical joker until he had drawn his own arms entirely free of that fatal coat and dropped it to the earth. Then he slapped his thigh.

"Stranger," he said, "yuh be er-lookin' on Ezekiel Obadiah Sykes."

A smile came to the other's face.

"Ah!" said he. "'Natur's doctor.'"

"Th' same. Stranger, Sal Boler's husbun' thet wa'n't ar' goin' ter git whupped een erbout two minnuts." He launched forth with a mighty sub-binder, and — well, truth is truth — the next instant was knocked off his feet flat on his back. Rising to a sitting position, stunned, dizzy, and astounded, he gazed a moment up into the smiling face of the scientific boxer above him.

"Ezekiel," he said to himself softly, "Ezekiel Sykes, yuh be er dinged fool mos' trooly." Slowly picking up his coat, he turned his back on the assembling crowd and took the road for Raccoon Hollow. As he approached the house after his long journey the humor of the situation overcame him, and he chuckled quietly to himself.

"Th' feller be full er sub-binders es er hog be full er fleas," he said; and then as Sinking Mountain rose before him he added, cocking one eye and coming to a standstill: "Hit ain't onpossible thet it war th' same chap busted thet ar mount'in!"

"OLE MISS" AND "SWEETHEART."

I.

I HAD reached the ridge by such gradual ascents that I scarcely realized how high it was. The last single bird my dog had set passed straight away over the top, trailing a broken leg; and partly to seek him, and partly to reach a point from which I might locate the railroad whence in the early morning I had wandered, I followed the route he chose. At the top I found myself upon an old bastion, one of the few visible footprints of war, for Macon was not many miles away, and here, but for the armistice that followed Appomattox, Wilson would have met an armed foe instead of a flag of truce.

The scene before me was transcendently beautiful. An undulating plain lay spread at my feet, and ten miles away the blue hills rose up again and hemmed it in. This plain was dotted here and there with cabins — the mansions were nearly all gone. The exceptions stood forth in the distance — white homes

studding the green slopes. Curving round the base of my hill ran the steel bands of the railroad, and not two miles away I saw the station.

The sun with me was shining with a fierce glare, and I wondered at the cheerful song of the negroes near at hand, picking cotton from the white rows which stood in ranks about the abandoned fort. But away off straight ahead a broad shadow lay upon the plain over which the clouds swept grandly eastward, and ten miles to the right I saw the trailing rain rushing across a darkened belt of woods. From this cooling spot the wind came with a delicious touch.

"Yes, sir," said a boy, whose labors had brought him abreast of me, "dere 's a spring down yonner."

He pointed to where on the plain two great Lombardy poplars lifted their boughs skyward, and thither, with almost parched lips, down the steep gravelly slopes I moved.

As I approached nearer the two poplars, I saw that they stood to the right and left of a plantation burial-ground, whose rocky wall was overgrown with ivy, and interior with weeds. Beyond, two desolate-looking chimneys reared themselves in a clump of cedars, the nearest trees blackened and dead, as if from the touch of flames. My dog, with his nose in air, ran into the inclosure, and stood upon a "point." Passing under the poplars, I followed, with my gun ready; but nothing rose, and after one or two hesi-

tating starts, he pounced upon a dead bird and brought it to my feet. It had flown until its life was exhausted.

Then I noticed that the graves about me were marked by slabs, and on them I read the record of many Cassels who were "born" and who "died" according to the dates opposite these respective announcements. But one grave differed in its appointments. It bore the simple words "Old Miss," and was as white and clean as if laid but yesterday. There was no date, no epitaph; only the white slab and the legend "Old Miss." As I studied it curiously a gaudy lizard came from the weeds upon the hot stone, and questioned me with his bright eyes.

Passing out, I saw, a short way off, beneath the low, wide-spreading limbs of a black-gum, a cabin, and the red and blue turbans of two negro women. The dog had already announced my presence, and hurried on to the spring, guided by an unerring instinct. A little darky in one short garment peeped from behind his grandmammy, where he had fled from the brute's cold, inquisitive nose, and as I approached, the eyes of all three were turned upon me.

"Yes, sah," one of the women replied, putting aside a bread-tray, into which she was shelling pease; "en hit's good water, too. Set down, sah, tell I fetch er gourd."

"No, sah, don't nobody live heah 'cep'n' me en de

chillun," said the other, who had respectfully taken her cob pipe from her mouth and laid it aside. A pair of bright little eyes regarded me kindly from under a pair of enormous silver-rimmed spectacles, which had been pushed up over her forehead and were blankly studying the sky. The voice was low and peculiarly gentle. "De Cass'ls used ter live heah tell der war cummed on, den dey uz mos'ly killed up; en den de yarmy cum erlong en bu'nt de place. En Ole Miss died." She looked at me curiously as she asked, suddenly, "Does you know any uv de fambly?"

"No; but I saw a grave up yonder, with 'Old Miss' cut on it."

The old face took on a new light as I spoke. I began to recognize the old "mammy" of an *ante-bellum* Southern home.

"Yes, sah, we alls used to call 'er dat, 'cause she wuz Marse Alleck's widder; en atter while Young Miss cum erlong. Hit 's er pity you did n' know Ole Miss. Lord, Lord, but she uz er lady fum erway back!"

"Dat she wuz," interpolated the younger woman, who stood by while I drank the cooling draught from her long-handled gourd. "None er dese heah hifalutin' kind; no, sah. She uz es tall 'mos' es you, en es straight es er Ingin, w'ich uz natchul, fur she cum fum Firginny, en dey do say one uv 'er great-grandma's wuz pure Ingin herse'f."

The dog, having, after the fashion of setters, cooled himself in the spring, was stretched upon the ground, watching me with half-shut eyes. The shade was refreshing and the rest welcome. I settled down in the white-oak chair, while the young woman resumed her pea-shelling, and let the garrulous old mammy continue with her memories. The show of attention was a small price to pay for the relaxation of limbs in this cool shade.

The speaker continued slowly: "But Ole Miss uz er lady, en er fine lady at dat, fum de time Ole Marster fetch 'er down heah in de kerridge, wid es grays jes' er-prancin', tell she uz laid out up yonner by 'im, dead. Nobody nev'r saw 'er when she warn't dressed up like she uz er-goin' ter er party. En lace! Well, sah, up ter de las' ole silk dress she had lef' wuz splittin' in de creases she had real lace caps en collars, en lace on 'er sleeves en han'kerchiffs. W'en she warked she jes' sorter move erlong wid 'er he'd 'way up yonner, en did n't look like she uz er-stepp'n' at all. Nobody nev'r knowed 'er ter laf out loud; but she 'd smile de sweetes', en 'er voice uz sof', like de win' out yonner in de pines. But dat uz w'en she uz at peace wid uz all; but jus' you let 'er git riled — en et took er heap ter rile 'er, lemme tell you — en 'er eyes 'u'd dance, en 'er words cut de arr like de oberseer's whup on er bad nigger's back. 'T wus de same way w'en she uz er gal. But kind en good! Lord! I seen 'er menny

er-time go down dem back steps en set up over yonner in de quarters wid er sick nigg'r all night long, er-doin' fur 'er like she uz white en kin; en she wid 'er silks en laces on too! You know den dere warn't nair' nigg'r on de place but 'd er died fur Ole Miss; en well dey might, fur God knows she uz er good ooman, en had seen er heap er trubbl'. Ef had n't er been fur de baby, I don't reck'n she 'd er held out es long es she did."

"So there was a baby?"

"Yes, sah. You see," she continued, "Marse Frank uz erbout all de Cass'ls dat uz lef'. W'en he uz killed up yonner at — at — watcher call it? — Getty——"

"Gettysburg?"

"Yes, sah. W'en Marse Frank uz killed, ev'ybody sed de race uz gone; but bime-by er little gal cum, en 'er ma en Ole Miss all fell ter cryin', en dey gave 'er her pa's name. But 'er ma called 'er Sweetheart, en so ev'ybody got ter callin' her dat."

"En I reck'n," said Mandy, "nair' nuther baby like 'er nev'r lived."

"You see," said the first speaker, whose memories had been stirred, "Mandy heah used ter nuss 'er, 'cause her ma uz weak en sickly; but nuth'n' 'u'd do but I mus' tu'n gal ergin en ten' dat baby. Dat uz 'er gran'ma's noshun — Miss Carrie warn't nuth'n' but er gal 'erself w'en Marse Frank tuk 'er right out uv er ballroom en fetch 'er heah. But she uz er lady down

ter 'er heels, en es good, en had es good er heart, es de bes'. Only she did n't know nuth'n' 'bout babies, en me en all de fambly, fum Ole Miss on, had ter he'p. But 't warn't 'er fault the baby died."

"Died?"

"Yes, sah; hit died. I know'd fum de fust what uz er-goin' ter happ'n. Sumtime hit look ter me like er baby es er heap old'r 'n hit is. Dis wun uz er-laughin' en er-crow'n' 'fo' hit uz er week ole, en I told Mandy den dat hit uz er bad sign. Cry? No, sah. En she know'd folks by deir names. Ef ennybody 'd say, 'Mammy,' she set eyes on me; en ef dey call er ma's name, she 'd tu'n roun' en look like she uz er-lis'nin'. One night I wake up, en she uz er-lay'n' dere laugh'n' en er-call'n' 'Papa'; en hit look ter me like she uz er-talk'n' ter sumbody wot uz wid 'er; but dey wuz n't nobody dere, en 'er pa uz de'd en buried 'mos' two years back. Lord! Lord! but de chile's ways did worry me; en I know'd w'at uz cummin'. W'en she l'arnt ter say 'Mamma,' look ter me like Miss Carrie 'u'd kiss 'er ter def; en den she 'u'd cry en say, 'Ef 'er pa c'u'd only hev lived!' En den she 'd hug de baby en cry ergin."

"Miss Carrie uz er mighty good ooman," said Mandy, pouring her pease into a basket, and replenishing her tray from the unshelled stock—"er mighty good ooman."

"Dat she wuz—es good es de bes'. En dat chile?—

look like hit uz her life. Young marster, I reck'n you don't know nuthin' 'bout babies, en can't tell; but I 'tended Ole Miss, en Ole Miss's chillun, en dey chillun too, en I tell you sumtimes dere cum erlong one w'at 's goin' ter 'stonish ev'ybody; en dis uz de wun in de Cass'l fambly. Hit warn't menny munts 'fo' hit 'u'd lay erwake in de night, en talk en talk like grow'd-up folks, but nobody uz dere'bouts 'cep'n' me en Young Miss, en she uz mos' gener'ly ersleep; en, bless yo' soul, honey! I warn't goin' ter wake 'er up; hit 'u'd cum soon ernuff. 'T ain't fur me ter say who dat chile uz er-talkin' ter, but dere uz sumbody dere wid 'er, en I kivered up my he'd many er time, 'cause I nev'r know'd w'at dey might er wanted ter say. Warn't nobody gwine ter hu't dat chile, do'. En den ter heah 'er sing 'la! la! la!' en 'la! la! la!'—sorter prac's'n' like! Psha! I tole Mandy den po' Miss Carrie uz goin' ter see trouble. Hit warn't natchul fur er baby ter nev'r cry, en ter be er-talkin' ter 'erse'f in de night-time. En Ole Miss uz sorter worr'd 'bout et too, only she would n't let on dat she wuz. One day," she continued, after reaching over to shove a chunk under the kettle boiling near at hand—"one day she uz er-layin' dere singin' w'en er yaller butt'rfly cum in de room, en dance erbout tell 'e find 'er. He sorter balunce roun' 'er er minit, en sudden like she stop en look et hit wi' dem big brown eyes. En den de butt'rfly look at her, stan'in' on de piller en

er-movin' es wings up en down, so,"—she gave a capital representation of the movement,—"en den he dance roun' en go out de winder ergin. Well, sah, dat chile jes' lay dere lookin' at dat winder, en bimeby she sorter smile er li'l', en 'er eyes shot, en she uz ersleep 'fo' you could er tu'ned roun'. Jes' 'bout dat time er mock'n'-burd fly down by de winder, and sing tell I hatter go en run em erway. Sum folks don't take notus uv signs en warnin's," she continued, looking at me cautiously, "but dere ain' nuthin' kin keep ole mammy fum b'lievin' dere uz more in dat den er stray butt'rfly projec'n' roun'." She paused just long enough to bestow a whack upon the little darky for "chunkin'" chips at the dog. "Ain' menny munts pass 'fo' dat baby start ter walkin', en den we had et, sho nuff. Look like she did n' wanter go now'ere but out yonner in de frunchard, where Ole Miss's flow'rs used ter wuz. I nev'r seed sech a chile fur flow'rs; en lemme tell you I tended 'em all fum erway back. She ain' pull 'em like nair' nuth'r wun uv em. Now Marse Frank uz putty much de same way 'bout 'em; but he nev'r lef' nuthin' grow'n' w'en he went 'long, but 'u'd knock down ev'yt'ing he could get es hands on; en menny 's de time I seen Ole Miss box es jaws 'bout et, too," she added, shaking silently over the far-away picture. "But 't warn't so wid de baby. Sum flow'rs she would n' tech ter save yer. She 'd paddle right erlong by de pinks en de jewrainyems

en de 'santhymums, en stan' up under er ole red rose bush en tek wun down. En she 'd pick et open, en talk en talk en talk tell hit 'u'd 'mos' run me crazy. En fus' sing you know, yonner she 'd go er-paddl'n' cl'ar 'cross de yard, en git er ole mornin'-glory en talk ter hit. Need n' tell me dat chile did n' know w'at she uz erbout! En nuthin' would n' pest'r 'er nuth'r. I seen 'er tek er bumble-bee out'n er mornin'-glory menny er time, en hold em up tell he 'd fly off. 'Fear'd dey 'd sting 'er? No, sah. Dey know'd 'er, en she know'd dem. You kin laugh, en I reck'n hit 's hard fur city folks ter b'lieve, but hit 's true. En de hummin'-burds? Lord! you 'd er laughed sho' nuff ter seen 'em sorter draw back out'n re'ch uv 'er han's en look 'er in de eye, wid deir coats er-shinin' in de sun like er June-bug's back. En butt'rflies? Dey 'd skip roun' 'er all de time, en ef she had shooger in 'er han's—which she had mighty of'n, 'cause Ole Miss let 'er go ter de shooger-dish 'bout when she wanted ter—dey 'd set on top 'er fingers, en jes' keep out'n fum betwix' 'em. Nuthin' would n' hu't dat chile. No, sah. She slip off one day, w'en I uz er sorter nodd'n' out dere und'r de mulberry by de kitchen, en, bless yo' soul! w'en I woke up she uz er-sett'n' down frunt er ole Bull, er-pilin' san' on es he'd, en Bull uz er-layin' dere wid es years pull back, er-lett'n' 'er do 'bout like she please. Bad? Yes, sah. Ain' but one nigg'r on de place could tie up dat dog, en he wuz

'way off yonner in de cott'n. I tell you dere uz a time den, 'cause Ole Miss had dun cum out on de po'ch, en uz er-care'in' on pow'ful. Don't make no diffunce w'ere dat baby wuz, Ole Miss cum erlong putty soon. En hit took er heap er talk'n' ter get de baby back, 'cause ev'y time ennybody went dere, Bull show'd es teef, en dat uz ernuff. But bime-by she git up en cum off by 'erse'f, en ole Bull sorter lay es he'd down on one foot, en sweep de groun' behine em wid es tail, axin' 'er es plain es 'e could talk ter cum back. I know'd nuthin' warn't goin' ter hu't dat chile.

"Yes, sah, she kep' well, too, 'cep'n' wid 'er teef. Dey uz mighty hard on 'er fum de fus', but she git erlong well ernuff tell dem eye-teef reddy ter cum. You see, Miss Carrie uz er town gal, en ez good er hearted ooman es ev'r lived,—I ain' er-say'n' nuth'n' ergin 'er,—but she did n't know nuth'n' 'bout de Cass'l babies; en w'en I brought er string er wood-ants, jes' same es Marse Frank cut teef wid, ter hang 'roun' de baby's neck, she laf 'erse'f 'mos' to def, en sed we uz 'soopstishus nigg'rs,' en she would n' 'low no sech doin's wid *her* baby. En w'en Mandy fetched er string er snail-shells, w'ich es mighty good dey-sevs, she laffed ergin, en give 'er er silver quarter; but she would n' let 'em go on de baby nuth'r. Den ole 'Liza cum wun day wid er mole's foot, en hit could n' go dere nuth'r. En w'en Ole Miss wanted er

rabbit killed en hits brains rubbed on de baby's gums, Lord! but sech cryin' en care'in' on you nev'r seed sence you uz born'd.

"Well, so hit went; en one day I seed Miss Carrie dancin' de baby up en down 'fo' de lookin'-glass, en dat settl' et. I told Mandy den dere uz er-goin' ter be troubl' sho'. Ain' nuth'n' hu't me wuss 'n dat. I'd dun hel' in tell I could n' stan' hit no long'r, en wun day I seed Ole Miss er-watch'n' de chile when she tort nobody uz erroun', en I seed fum 'er face she warn't satusfied. Den I sed, look'n' her fair in de face, 'Ole Miss, dere's sum'n' wrong wid dis hear chile, en you ought n' ter set store by 'er too much.' Bless your soul! you orter seen 'er; she shuk all ov'r, en 'er face tu'n white.

"'Hush!' she said, so loud hit like ter skeer'd de life out er me. En den she whispered, 'No! no! no! dere's sum mussy lef' in Hebb'n yet,' en went straight ter 'er room. Den I know'd she'd dun seen hit too.

"Well, sah, troubl' cum right erlong. One day w'en I had been ov'r ter de Simkinses' ter see my tuther gal w'at 'd married er po' sort uv er nigg'r ov'r dere—en 'e ain' no better now 'n 'e wuz den—wud cum dat de baby uz mighty sick, en Ole Miss hed sont de kerridge fur me. W'en I got dere I foun' Miss Carrie settin' in 'er room wid de baby in 'er lap, en 'er eyes uz sot in er hard look. 'Mammy,' she said, jes' es cool es I'm er-say'n' hit now, 'my

baby es goin' to die.' You see, hit 'u'd dun cum ter 'er at las' jes' like hit did ter me at fus'. But I made b'lieve she uz only sorter skeered, en tuk de baby. Hit uz er-bu'nin' up wid fev'r. Lord! Lord! how hit all cums back! She used ter lay 'er he'd down on my shoulder en sleep w'en she would n' sleep no uth'r way; en w'en I tuk 'er up, she jes' say, loud ernuff ter heah, 'Mammy'; en I say, 'Yes, honey, mammy goin' ter stay wid yer.' En I lay 'er he'd down dere on my should'r. Well, sah, she uz er sick'r chile 'n I know'd; en w'en I look' at 'er, I nev'r seed sech a change. Movin' 'er uz too much. 'Peared ter me like she uz alreddy de'd, en I uz er-lookin' down in de grave at 'er. En I b'lieve ef I had n't laid 'er down mighty quick, she would er died right dere. En all she sed uz 'Mammy.' Lord! I've hyard dat wurd ev'r sence—'Mammy.'"

The old woman turned to the fire again, and made pretense to rearrange the chunks, while her daughter bent silently over the tray. Presently she resumed:

"Dem wuz hard times. You see, we ought'r had er heap we could n' git. Quinine uz scyarce, en munny could n' buy hit, en we could n' bre'k de fev'r enny uther way. En ice uz scyarce too. Well, we watched en tended, tell bime-by de doct'r tuk Miss Carrie en say she mus' res'; en by dis time she might es well res', 'cause de baby did n' know nobody, en we all could do fer 'er heap bett'r 'n hits ma. So

Miss Carrie went erlong upstairs 'mos' de'd 'erse'f, en I promis' 'er she should see de baby 'fo' hit die. Well, I watch' all dat night en nex' day, en w'en de sun went down I see er new look on 'er face—a hard, de'd look—en 'er han's were col' en stiff, en 'er eyes sot. Den I went up ter Miss Carrie's room, 'cause I know'd hit wuz time, but I did n' say nuthin'. 'I know,' she said. 'Lemme see my baby wunst mo'.' En all I could do uz ter cry en ter he'p 'er downstairs.

"Well, sah, I *wuz* 'stonished den, sho' nuff, ter see how she tuk hit. I uz er-hold'n' 'er on my arm ter keep 'er fum fall'n', 'cause she uz mighty sick en weak like 'erse'f. She did n' cry en care' on, but jes' lif' 'er face up ov'r de baby en say, sof' like, 'Tek 'er, dear Christ, en keep 'er tell I cum.'

"'Cum now, honey,' says I, 'hit 's ernuff, hit 's ernuff. He 'll tek kyar uv 'er; don't you worry 'bout dat.' En so, lean'n' on me, she tu'ned to go. But she ain't tek many steps 'fo' she look up in my face en say, like 'er heart uz break'n', 'Mammy, lemme tell my baby good-night—lemme tell 'er good-night.' En I could n' er he'p'd et ter save my life. Hit uz jes' dark ernuff fur de lamps, en wun uz bu'nin' low. We went back, en she ben' down dere en put 'er face close ter de baby, en did n' nair' wun uv 'em move, but jes' staid dere face ter face. We all tried ter look tuth'r way, 'cause hit warn't right ter watch dem two, but

sumhow I could n'. En so at las' she tuk de littl' face in 'er han's en call'd 'er 'Sweetheart.' But dere ain' no word cum back. En so she said ergin, sof' like, 'Sweetheart'; en still no word. Den she sed — en I heah de wurds er-moan'n' in dat still room like hit uz yestiddy: 'Sweetheart, mamma 's cum ter tell you good-night — good-night en good-bye. You es goin' up ter God, my baby, ter Christ, ter sleep in es arms, not mine. I 'm goin' ter miss yer, baby, but yer won't miss me, for He es tend'r — oh, yes, He es tend'r, littl' one; en papa is dere ter meet yer too. Don't you git erfear'd uv de dark, Sweetheart. You won't be by yo'se'f. Mammy will hol' wun han' tell Jesus teks de yuther. En sum day — O God!' she moan'd out, tu'nin' 'er he'd erway — 'sum day, darling, I 'm goin' ter cum too. Good-bye! good-bye! good-bye!' she kep' on er-sayin' good-bye, sof' like, tell I could n' heah et, fur she dun got cl'ar down wid 'er cheek ergin de baby.

"Well, sah, de proof uz dere. Jes' den dat chile cum back to hits body fur de fus' time in fo' days. Hits eyes look right up a littl' while, en den hit lif' hits lips jes' er littl', en den hits ma ben' down ergin en tech 'em. She lif' 'er lips dis way t'ree times, en all de wimmin cry out, en I shouted too: 'Hit 's God's mussy; let 'er go now! Hit 's God's mussy; let 'er go!' But she warn't reddy ter go. No, sah; she look dis way en dat way wid dem big eyes sot on me, en she lif' 'er lips; en 'er ma cry out, 'Kiss

'er, mammy, kiss 'er; she wants ter tell yer good-bye.' En, bless yo' soul! I down on my knees en kiss 'er, en den 'er eyes shet.

"En Miss Carrie, wid er smile on 'er face, en stan'-in' straight en strong, lif' me up en lead me ter de do', for I uz all broke down en er-cryin' like ev'body else. At de do' she tu'n ergin en say, jes' es sweet like es ev'r she talk in 'er life: 'God es good ter me. We 're goin' ter meet ergin, Sweetheart; you will sleep in mamma's arms ergin, but not ter-night, not ter-night.' En I felt 'er sorter tremble erginst me.

"Well, all this time Ole Miss warn't no mann'r account. She 'd cum in de room en sit dere look'n' at dat chile 'n fannin' 'er slow en sof', en w'en de doctor cum she 'd look at him ev'y time 'e sed ennything, but nev'r so much es op'n' 'er mouf. Dere warn't no sleep in 'er eyes. Menny 'er time she 'd cum in en look at me in de night er-settin' dere, en den at de baby, en go out. Bime-by she 'd cum ergin. She look'd like ter me she uz er-warkin in 'er sleep 'erse'f, sorter skeer'd en simple like. I know'd she warn't herse'f den. But w'en me en Miss Carrie uz er-shak'n' dere in de do', ev'ything change in er minit. You orter seen Ole Miss den. She 'd been er-sett'n' dere, wid 'er face white en still, look'n' at de baby, en now she riz up sudd'n like, en stood wid 'er ha'r streamin' down on 'er should'rs, en she es straight es er Ingin, en 'er eyes er-blazin'.

"'Go,' she said, pointin' 'er long finger at me.

'Tek dat chile ter 'er room, en cum back heah.' Her voice sung out cl'ar, en cut the arr like er bell er-ringin'. I know'd 'er den. She started ter wark de room en I hyard 'er keep er-sayin', 'Fools! fools! fools!' Miss Carrie give 'er one quick look, en I hyard *her* say, 'Po' ole mamma!' Den I got 'er upstairs ergin.

"W'en I cum back, dere wuz Ole Miss still er-wark'n' en er-sayin', 'Fools! po' weak fools!' ter 'erse'f. En ev'y wunst 'n er while she 'd toss up 'er han's en shake 'er he'd en sorter trimble all over. All er sudd'n she shouted out, 'She shall *not* die!' Wid dat she warked out inter de nex' room like she uz done gone crazy sho' nuff. I tell yer I uz skeer'd den, 'cause hit did look ter me like Ole Miss might give out en drop down de'd; so I slipp'd up ter de do' en watch'd 'er. She went er-stormin' up ter de closet dere, en took down de big Bible, where all de Cass'ls' names en de Wuthin'tons' uz writ, en I se'd 'er spread et op'n in de middle, en fling 'erse'f down on 'er knees dere, en lay 'er face on et. En dere she lay en shuk er minit, but not long. She lif' up one han' at las' en tu'n her po' ole white face to, en cried out loud, wid de uth'r han' on de page, 'Look, my God! look! All gone! all! all! all!—all but dis little one! Husban', fath'r, mudd'r, br'ers, sist'rs, sons—all!—all but this little lam'! Have I cried out befo'? Did I rebel erginst yer? One at Marnassus, one at Malvun Hill, one at Shiloh, one at Gettusburg—fever en bullet, shot en

shell, but nev'r er word, O my God! One by one they brought 'em home—husban', fath'r, en sons. Hit uz thy will. These ole han's closed nev'r er eye. Hit uz thy will. These ears 'ceived no las' messurges. Hit uz thy will. I gave them inter thy keep'n', en fur dey country, w'en de call cum, en you took 'em. I gave 'em, I say, en no eye see'd de tears in mine. *I know'd hit all w'en dey march'd erway. I wuz ready!* My baby boy!—dat uz de hardes'. En dey tole me he cried out "Mudder!" w'en he fell. O my God! my God! did you heah dat cry! I have hyard et ev'y day sence. En now dis chile, his chile, my only one! Leave 'er ter my ole age, O my God! leave me dis one. I been too proud en too col', but I am brok'n now. Leave my baby!'

"De words b'nt inter me like fire. I crep' back dere en set down. Nobody nev'r seen Ole Miss broke down befo'. She uz iron all ov'r, en hit us jes' like she sed. Dey brought ole marster home fus', en den de young ones, tell de las' cum; en she stood by en saw de graves fill'd up, en nobody ev'r know'd et ef she ev'r shed er tear. She wen' down on 'er knees, en I hyard 'er hour atter hour cryin' out, 'Leave me dis one! leave me dis one!' En hit did look like she uz er-prayin' ergin def, for de baby uz col' den, en er-gettin' stiff. Dere warn't no bref. She uz de'd es ever I seen ennybody.

"Well, sah, I uz dat worn out, w'at wid Ole Miss

sayin' de same t'ing hour atter hour in de night, en my bein' up so much, I sorter los' myse'f. Sum folks sez I uz noddin', but don't you b'lieve er word er hit. All uv er sudden hit look like I c'u'd see er shinin' angel wid de baby in es arms, en Ole Miss er-holdin' on ter es robes, en er-cryin' out, 'Leave me dis one!' En bime-by de angel cum back en lay de baby down on de bed, en I uz erbout ter call Ole Miss, w'en sudd'n I hyard the Bible slam, bang! en Ole Miss shout, 'She will live!' Den she cum er-stompin' tru de do', wid 'er eyes er-blazin' en 'er face shinin' like nobody ev'r seen hit befo', en bless yo' soul! jes' den I hyard a little weak voice dere er-sayin', 'Mammy—mammy,' en I re'ch out my han'. De chile uz warm. 'Yes, yes,' I shouted; 'hit's His work! hit's His work! She done cum back fum de de'd.' En all de wimmin, hyarin' de noise, cum runnin' in, cryin' out, 'De baby es de'd! de baby es de'd!' But Ole Miss, er-stan'n' straight ergin, shouted back: 'Hit 's er lie; she lives. Back fum de bed, en give 'er air. Back, I say!' En dey took one look et Ole Miss, en 'mos' bre'k deir necks gittin' out en down de steps. En erbout dis time Miss Carrie cum down, er-holdin' on de walls en do's, en er-steddyin' 'erse'f bes' she could. She cum en stood dere in de do', white es er ghos', but sayin' nuthin'. En Ole Miss wen' up en put 'er arms roun' her, en tuk 'er ter de bed. 'Now, you c'n lay down,' she sez, 'en sleep. De baby went up yonner,

but God look down on us, en sont er angel ter fetch 'er back.' En Miss Carrie laid down en tech 'er lips ter de baby's. 'She 's warm, en she sleeps,' she whispered. Den she sorter settled down, en fus' sing you know we uz er-rubbin' 'er, tryin' ter fetch 'er back too, 'cause she 'd dun fainted, en staid fainted 'mos' an hour."

There was silence a moment. The scenes so vividly painted seemed to survive in my imagination. Suddenly the old woman broke in, with a low chuckle, "Mandy, you rec'lec' de nex' We'n'sday atter dat day?"

"Yes, marm. Ain' nobody w'at uz dere furgot et." The old woman rose up from the fire she had been punching again.

"Well, sah," she continued, "sech doin's nev'r uz seed on de plantation sence my day. Ole Miss sed de Lord hed dun show'd 'er mussy, en ev'ybody mus' have er hol'day. Choosdy de oberseer picked out 'leven fat hogs en fo' yearlines, en started de barbecue 'long 'bout dark. En while dey uz er-cookin' de vitu'ls, de nigg'rs uz er-dancin' en er-sing'n'. Look ter me like I nev'r seen nigg'rs dance en sing like dat befo'. Blind Billy uz dere wid es fiddle, en Mike Slow wid de bones, en Tom Peeples wid es banjo. Ole Miss let 'em have er littl' whisky, en hit uz 'swing your cornders,' en 'han's all roun',' en 'shashay cross,' tell mighty nigh day. I do b'lieve Unc' Tom — Tom wuz de kerridge driver — uz de highes'

stepper dere. Ain' nobody love dat baby bett'r 'n Unc' Tom. Ev'y mornin' 'mos' befo' de sun uz up good, he 'd hetch up de horses, en wid me er-sett'n' back in dere like er fine lady en de baby er-sett'n' by me, he 'd drive all ov'r ev'rywhere, en w'en we git back she 'd sleep, en Unc' Tom 'u'd tek 'er jes' es tend'rly es ennybody, en car' 'er in de house w'ile I hol' de hosses. En when she uz so bad off, he 'd cum ev'y mornin' ter de po'ch en look at we alls en shake es hed en go off. Dat night er big load uz off Unc' Tom, en 'e uz er-jumpin' roun' cuttin' de short dog good es de bes', en makin' b'lieve he uz goin' ter kiss sumbody.

"Sho' nuff de next day de crops wuz n't wurk'd. De mules lay dey he'ds ov'r de fence en holler'd ter de cows, like dey uz er-askin' what uz de matt'r, 'cause dey know'd 't warn't Sunday, en de cows hollered back en say dey dun know. Erbout dinn'r-time, do', ev'ything uz reddy down dere by de spring, en de horn blow'd. Lord! Lord! how dem nigg'rs did eat en eat! Look ter me like sum er 'em would kill dey-sevs. Hog meat, biscuits fum de kitch'n, buttermick, chick'n, gingerbread, en corn beer uz es thick es cotton in de patch, en hit were er hol'day sho' nuff.

"Well, sah, right den and dere I seed sum'n' w'at 'stonish me. Heah cum erlong er soger, en wark right up to de house, en w'en Ole Miss cum out on de po'ch hit would er make yer cry ter seen 'em. He uz well-nigh barefooted, en his clo'es uz rags. He uz dat

white too dat you 'd er said he uz er clayeat'r, en es 'e stood dere 'e put es han' on de rail ter steddy hisse'f. He warn't no bad-look'n' man nuther, jes' 'bout yo' size en buil', en de same forehead en curly hair, en er way er hold'n' up es he'd make me t'ink 'bout 'im fus' time I laid eyes on yer.

"'Madum,' he said, sof' like, er-tak'n' off es hat, 'I am er-makin' my way back ter New Orlyans, en am mighty nigh starv'd fur de want uv sum'n' ter eat. I mus' ask yer ter he'p me, en tek de chances er gittin' paid w'en de war is ov'r, 'cause I aint got no munny now.' Dat uz w'at 'e sed, en, bless yo' soul! 'e sed hit like 'e uz fresh from er ballroom, instid uv de hospit'l which 'e wuz, wid es arm gone, en so weak 'e could n' stan' steddy. But you oughter seen Ole Miss. She stretch out 'er arm en draws 'im up ter 'er like 'e wuz 'er son, er-sayin', 'God dun sont you hyah, my boy. I sees hit now. You is my gues', God-sent.' Den she took 'im in de house, en made 'im set down by de big table, en de fus' sing she did uz ter sen' me down in de cellar ter git er bottle er wine. Dere wuz n' but five lef', 'cause she done car'd de balunce ter Macon fur de sick sogers long ergo. Dey say hit uz made de year de stars fell, mighty nigh 'bout forty years befo'. Well, sah, she po'd out sum fur dat boy, en he did n' look like nuthin' but er boy, en 'e stood up lean'n' 'g'inst de table en drink ter es country, 'e ses, en es country's wimmin, jes' like 'e wuz at er

party. But she made 'im set down, en fetch'd 'im sum dinn'r wid 'er own han's. En w'en she got dun dere uz ernuff fur ennybody. Well, sah, de po' man took sum barbecue on es fork en lif' et up two times ter es mouf, en den put et back wid es han' er-shak'n', en w'en Ole Miss ax 'im w'at de matter, he cov'r es face wid es han' en shake all ov'r, er-sayin' 'e dat hungry 'e could n' eat: dat 'e hed been tu'ned fum do' ter do' tell he uz 'mos' reddy ter give et up. But bime-by 'e get so 'e can eat, en den Ole Miss tek 'im upstairs en give 'im er room en sum ov Marse Frank's clo's, en er pa'r boots en er nice cap. She look at dat cap er long time, en kiss hit, 'cause hit uz de cap 'e had on w'en he uz kilt. But she put et on de soger's he'd herse'f, en give 'im sum munny too, en sont down ter de pasture en ketch Marse Frank's hoss, which wuz Beauregard, en put Marse Frank's saddle on em too, 'cause de gemman say 'e 'bliged ter go on. W'en 'e cum down, you would n't er know'd 'im. He wuz like er new man, but mighty weak. When he kiss Ole Miss han' he lef' es tears dere. But Ole Miss, wid 'er han' on es shoulder, ses, 'In God's name I bid you farewell.' En 'e sed ef de pra'rs uv er wife en mud-d'r en hisself, en de love uv er baby boy, uz good, she 'd git 'er pay. But Ole Miss dun up en say de Lord dun settl' wid 'er already, en I know'd w'at she wuz er-tarkin' erbout. Den 'e ride off, en out yonner he tu'n en take off es cap fur de las' time. He wuz

ter write back ef 'e got dere safe, but nobody ain' hyard fum 'im, en ev'ybody sed 'e mus' er died erlong de way. But he did n'."

"And what became of the family?"

"Well, sah, de war cumm'd down hyah, en dey refugeed erway off yander ter fus' one place en den ernuther. En de house got bu'nt, en all de stock uz run off. Den Ole Miss died sumw'ere, en uz sont back hyah, en Miss Carrie went back ter 'er folks, dey say; en all uv 'em uz dun got so po' dey could n' do nuth'n' fer we all. One day Miss Carrie sont me er letter ter say I mus' n' let Ole Miss' grave get los', en I ain't. Fus' I sot up a board out dere on de bury'n'-groun'; en den I scrape er little munny fum de tuckies en gyard'n en er cotton patch, en had er man ter put down dat slab."

"It must have taken considerable."

"Hit did; but not so much es ef I had n't er had de stone already." She shifted herself uneasily in her chair, and looked down as she explained. "You see, Ole Cun'l Bill Cass'l uz buried up yonner too, wid er fine slab ov'r him, en 'e uz de meanes' white man you ever seed w'en 'e uz livin', so I thought Ole Miss bett'r have dat stone en let 'im do 'thout fer er while; en we jes' tu'ned hit ov'r en did de cuttin' en polishin' on tuth'r side. But hit ain' fixed jes' right. None uv us could n' 'call de time w'en she uz born'd 'zactly, or w'en she died, en Miss Carrie dun gone off ergin ter

er new place. I know'd she uz born'd uv er Sunday, en died uv er Sunday, but hit 's er long time ergo. So I jes' tole 'em ter put 'Ole Miss' on et. En I ses ter myse'f, ef Miss Carrie ev'r got back hyah, es she will ef she live, en we all dun gone, 't ain't goin' ter be no troubl' ter find de place. But she nev'r cum back. She died putty soon atter dat ov'r yonner at er uncl' Wuthin'ton, in Bald'in County. But de baby cum, bless yo' soul! en *he* cum too, dat baby boy fum er-way out yonner in New Orlyans. It 's cureyus how pra'rs wuk out. I uz er-sett'n' hyah jes' dis way 'bout er ye'r ergo, w'en all er sudd'n er fine young gemman en er young lady dash up on horseback en stop right dere w'ere you es er-sett'n'. De minit I look in dere faces I hyard sum'in' er-callin' ter me erway back yonner, en ev'rything sorter swim, en w'en she up en ses, 'Aunty, kin you tell me w'ere de Cass'l place es?' I cried out, 'Hyar hit es, en bless God hyar 's er Cass'l dun cum back! Sweetheart! Sweetheart!' I sed, wid de tears er-runnin', 'Sweetheart!'

"'Yes,' she sed, en den I gather'd 'er roun' de knees. De tears uz er-stan'in' en 'er eyes too. 'This mus' be mammy,' she 'lowed, 'that po' mamma used ter talk so much erbout.' En she jumped down dere en I had 'er in dese ole arms wunst mo'. Den she laf er littl' en say, p'intin' ter de gemman, 'Now does yer know *him*?' I tuk one look at 'im en hit seem ter me like 'e dun cum out er de ole times too. All uv er

sudd'n 'e up en say, 'Does you 'member de po' soger w'at rode ole Beauregard away?' 'Yes, sah,' ses I, 'jes' like hit uz yestiddy. De las' sing 'e said wuz, "Ef de pra'rs uv er wife en mudd'r en hisse'f, en de love uv er baby boy, uz good, she 'd git paid."' Wid dat de young gemman lif' off his hat en say, 'De pra'rs uv er fath'r en mudd'r, en de love uv de baby boy, has been blessed; speshully de love uv de baby boy.'

"Dey tole me then dat Sweetheart had been off ter school all 'er life mos', en de fus' time she went up yonner ter de Ferginny Springs dey 'd met, en dat uz ernuff. Ennybody could er seed dey uz cut out fer one ernuther. Dey es er-cumm'n' back sum day ter buil' up de ole home ergin, but hit all won't nev'r b'long ter de Cass'ls ergin." The old woman laughed softly. "No, sah. 'Mammy' owns er hundred en fifty uv de bes' lan' hyah, en hit 's bin hers ev'r since de day de babies cum back."

So ran the way-side tale. When I bade the homely souls good-bye, and strode out to the railroad, I passed once more the old burial-ground, now bound with a new interest. The tall Lombardies, towering fifty feet above me, their limbs growing straight up, stood as motionless in the evening calm as monuments. There is not in nature a more placid tree. It never tosses its arms in the breeze, nor is lashed by

the storm. The oak is often worked into rage, but the Lombardy bends its far-away crest in melancholy acquiescence to a superior power, and its leaves but twinkle peacefully. So stood they there in their still and solemn watch. And under them nestled the grave with its simple legend, "Old Miss."

SISTER TODHUNTER'S HEART.

I.

THERE was an unusual excitement in Sweetwater. The new preacher, a young man of fine parts, accompanied by his wife, had arrived a few days before, delivered a most effective sermon, and had been called upon with the promptness common to country communities where isolation renders local curiosity unbearable after twenty-four hours. The lady of the parsonage, whose husband was but lately a theological student and now engaged for the first time upon regular pastoral labors, came from the city, and dressed in a manner that was bound to win her the admiration or the hatred of half the village. Already that grand, interchangeable jury common to all communities was sitting upon her case. The term is used in a figurative sense, for the inquest was conducted from yard to yard, window to window, and even across the one street along which Sweetwater was congregated.

Wherever two or three were gathered together and two of the three happened to be of the cradle-rocking order of society, Parson Riley's wife was the theme.

The climax was reached in the case when Parson Riley's wife sent out modest little notes inviting about twenty matrons to take tea with her the next day. Then the jury let the main question pass while it resolved itself into committees of one, each of which began with almost frantic anxiety to look into the question of dress. Adaptation became the order of the day, for no time remained for new garments, even if Sweetwater could have furnished them. Twenty ladies drew out from their hiding-places twenty bonnets of varied shapes, ages, and designs; twenty ladies shook to the breeze the camphored folds of twenty bombazines, alpacas, and venerable silks; and twenty pairs of hands went to work with needles, thread, hot irons, stain-eradicators, and all the household help that could be mustered, to turn the water of ancient respectability into the wine of modern style as outlined in stray magazines and described by the occasional town visitor.

So it was, then, that when Sweetwater, as very properly represented by its leading ladies, assembled in Parson Riley's modest little parlor and gazed upon itself in all its glory, a somewhat satisfied air settled over it. Poor, faded little Mrs. Brown, in her dingy alpaca, which everybody knew she bought nine years

"The terms were not liberal for Colonel Todhunter."
(Page 154.)

before with money awarded her at the county fair for preserves and pickles, and had turned and re-turned until it was equally worn all over, smiled placidly upon Mrs. Bailey's watered silk that she wore when she was a bride, and upon the bombazine gown that Mrs. Buckner inherited from her mother, and felt thoroughly comfortable. And Mrs. Buckner's little straw bonnet, that had been in fashion twice in the fifteen years of its service, rested easy upon her own artificial knot of hair when she beheld Mrs. Culpepper's Leghorn flare-front head-gear, and noted the cork-screw iron-gray curls pinned around the severe brow of Colonel Ledbetter's wife just as they had been on state occasions for twenty years.

This feeling of comfort was greatly strengthened by the fact that Parson Riley's wife wore a plain dark close-fitting gown of some flexible material without ornamentation, and that her hair was brushed back without any attempt at the fashionable arrangements they feared would crush them. Then the little lady moved about among them with her sweetest smiles, and the nicest tea, and a little notice for each of her guests. She had observed what an "elegant young woman" was Mrs. Buckner's Samanthy, just back from Wesleyan College in Macon; and Mrs. Brown's son Tom was "handsome enough to be governor." As for Mrs. Culpepper's baby, why, it was "just too lovely for anything." She captured a very

large-hearted woman entirely when she whispered to Mrs. Bailey that her husband was the finest-looking man she had seen in Sweetwater,—"excepting my Phil, you know," she added. And this loyalty only sank the compliment deeper. Then she hurried off for a pencil, and begged Mrs. Colonel Ledbetter to give her her recipe for making the scuppernong wine she had heard so much praised, and she laid her book in the dear old lady's lap and wrote it as dictated. In an hour Parson Riley's wife was by unanimous consent established at the head of Sweetwater, and could afford to take the company in to see her lace curtains, baby and baby dresses, and all the little bric-à-brac that had been showered upon her as a bride,—without awakening a single jealous feeling.

But a storm was brewing, and its first mutterings were heard when Mrs. Culpepper thoughtlessly mentioned "Sister Todhunter."

"Sister Todhunter?" said Parson Riley's wife, looking from one to the other, a puzzled expression shadowing her pretty face; "have I met Sister Todhunter? Dear me, can I have made a mistake after all?" She had tried so hard to please everybody, and here was trouble at the first move.

"No, my dear," said Mrs. Culpepper promptly; "it was I who made the mistake." But poor Mrs. Riley noted the ominous look upon the faces of several and the glances they exchanged.

"I am sure," she said earnestly, "I would have been glad to have had Sister Todhunter if I had known in time. Does she live in the village?"

"No, dear," said Mrs. Colonel Ledbetter; "she is a disagreeable old thing who lives out on her farm about a mile from here. You have n't lost anything by not knowing her." Mrs. Ledbetter was a power in the land, and her iron-gray curls shook in a dangerous and threatening manner as she declared herself. "She is sometimes pleasant, to be sure, but if it was n't for her husband, poor man, who married her out of pity, although she was only a 'cracker' and he a man of education and standing, she would n't be noticed."

"I think," said poor faded little Mrs. Brown meekly, "that Sister Todhunter has a good heart, and I 'm sure she always treated me kindly."

"And who would n't?" interposed Mrs. Culpepper, laughing. "You see some good in everybody, Sallie, and everybody sees some in you. But as for Sister Todhunter, she is better at long range."

Presently there was a movement among the ladies, and soon Parson Riley's wife, the recipient of twenty kisses and as many warm handshakes, was left alone with her empty cups and the memory of Sister Todhunter.

II.

WHEN Parson Riley heard the description of his wife's tea-party from her own lips, told with many a smile and an occasional sigh, his first resolution was to call upon Colonel Todhunter and his wife. So it was that early next morning he saddled his patient mare and ambled out to the Todhunter farm.

As Parson Riley approached the little cottage, he saw sitting on the steps a man with his chin in his hands. The first thing that impressed him was the air of extreme dejection about the individual, an air that became more marked after he had dismounted and advanced toward the house. Rousing himself from his reveries, the individual rose slowly and fixed a pair of tired, watery blue eyes upon the parson. The clothes he wore were broadcloth, but they were faded now, and stained down the front with tobacco juice; and they shone with a polish evidently acquired, like good manners, through long wear.

"This is Colonel Todhunter, I believe," said the visitor, holding out his hand. "I am the Rev. Mr. Riley." The gentleman in the polished suit held the proffered hand as he replied, in a singularly low and sweet voice:

"You 're the new parson, I reckon. You will have to speak louder; I am a little deef."

"Yes," said the parson, elevating his voice. "How is your family?"

"What did you say?" inquired the low, musical voice, while the blue eyes brightened a little.

"How is your family?"

"Oh, very well, I believe. Come in and set down." He led the way slowly, with a slight limp, toward the little porch. As they ascended the steps Parson Riley caught sight of the figure of an enormous woman in a calico dress and a white apron, that loomed up in the doorway. She carried in her hand a broom; and a broad, square, almost fierce face with small black eyes was turned upon him.

"'Mandy," said the colonel gently, "this is the new parson." "The new parson" stepped forward quickly and extended his hand.

"My dear madam, I am glad to meet you," he said, a smile kindling on his handsome face. She looked at him suspiciously, gave him her left hand, and said:

"Howdye!"

"I hope you are well, madam?"

"Toler'ble," she replied. And then she turned her back and moved off with an elephantine amble.

"So this is Sister Todhunter," thought Parson Riley. "Well, I shall have trouble here."

The men sat down, and the conversation began. Colonel Todhunter proved to be courtly, almost womanly, in his manners, but his few opinions were ventured with a diffidence most painful, and the parson was glad when the time came to say good-day. He was about to mount his mare again when the colonel, who had followed him out, touched his arm.

"I want to speak to you on a private matter," he said softly. "Suppose we walk a little." So arm and arm they moved off. "I want to speak about Mrs. Todhunter," said the gentle voice again. "To tell you the truth, Parson, I am leading a life here that is almost unbearable, and I think you can help me.

"Mrs. Todhunter is a violent woman, Parson,—I use the term advisedly; she is a violent woman, and unless I can bring about a marked change in her character, I do not know what I shall do. She uses language toward me that is altogether unchristian-like and unbecoming. And worse; when she gets one of her spells upon her, she assaults me with anything nearest at hand. Only this morning I received several blows from her broom that have nearly lamed me. Parson,"—they had reached the friendly shelter of the barn by this time, and the colonel straightened up a little, while his eyes actually glittered,—"I am tired of this dog's life, and I

want your assistance. I think if Mrs. Todhunter is formally reported to the church, and humiliated, it will bring about a change." Parson Riley's face showed his surprise, and the colonel added at once, "I have had this in mind a long time, and once I brought the matter to the mind of Parson Thompson, who preceded you,—a worthy man, but timid. He would not move in the matter. Now, will you?" Parson Riley was young and combative.

"I will," he said promptly.

"What?" The deaf man placed his hand to his ear.

"I will," shouted the parson. "Sister Todhunter shall be disciplined." The colonel looked pleased.

"I was a church-member myself once," he said softly, "but this eternal quarrel drove me out. I could not break bread feeling as I do toward Mrs. Todhunter." His chin trembled. He filled his cheeks with wind and blew it out under the pressure of his emotion. "You cannot imagine to what an extent this persecution has gone. Why, sir, there have been times when I considered my life in danger. I am not a dissipated man," he continued, resting his blue-veined hand upon the parson's shoulder and turning the blue eyes earnestly upon him, "but of course I take a julep now and then,—you understand; habits of an old-time Georgia gentleman,—and sometimes I have taken too much. I admit that

Mrs. Todhunter has had some provocation in that direction, but not enough, Parson, to justify her in regarding me as a dog." His breast heaved convulsively.

"A woman," said the young man firmly, touched by the pathos and emotion of his dignified companion, "has no right to strike her husband except in the defense of her life."

"Hey?" Colonel Todhunter cupped his left ear deftly with the transparent hand.

"I say a woman has no right to strike her husband ——"

"Why, bless your soul, parson, that 's a small matter, a very small matter indeed!" A sad smile flitted across the lips of the speaker. "A very small matter." He fixed his eyes upon his companion with a sudden resolution. "Why, do you know, Mrs. Todhunter came near smothering me, only last week?"

"Smothering?"

"Hey?"

"Came near smothering you?"

"Yes, sir. To tell the truth, Parson, I was a little mixed — had taken a little too much, you understand. Had been camping out a week down at Bloomley's mill with Colonel Ledbetter and others, fishing, and drank a little too much. Unfortunat'ly I came home a little under the influence of stimulants, and found

"That 's a small matter."

Mrs. Todhunter on fire about the cotton being in the grass. As I was preparing to lie down, being also ill, Mrs. Todhunter, with her superior strength and weight, forced me between the mattresses and sat down on me. And there she sat, Parson, three hundred pounds, and it a July day, and knitted all the afternoon. 'I 'll sweat that whisky out er you,' she says; and she did. The perspiration that exuded from my pores soaked through the mattress and dripped on the floor. I do not know how I lived through it." He drew out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead, to which the memory of his sufferings had actually brought the moisture. "When will you move in the matter?" he asked more cheerfully.

"At once."

"Hey?"

"At once. I'll have her up next Sunday——"

Parson Riley paused. The vast presence of Sister Todhunter had passed around the corner of the barn. There was a painful silence of about two seconds, and then her voice arose.

"So," she said loudly, with her eye on the colonel, who started as though shot, "so! *This* is your game, is it? tellin' lies on your wife to every stranger that comes along. I'll teach you better manners, if I have to break every bone in yer soft, cowardly body." She made a rush at her offending lord, which he easily and promptly avoided by stepping briskly

away, leaving his late companion to hold the field as best he might.

"Madam," said Parson Riley, raising his hand as if about to ask a benediction,—it was his most impressive attitude,—"I beseech you to remember that this gentleman is your husband and that you are a member of my church ——"

"What have you got to do with hit, you little chick'n-eatin' thing you?" She had turned upon him with war in her eye and war in her whole make-up generally. "A pretty sort er parson you air, ain't yer, hangin' roun' decent women's houses list'nin' ter lies an' slanders. Oh, I know what he wants; he wants ter git me up 'fore Moun' Zion Church. He tried hit on ole Thompson, but *he* daresn't move er peg. I tole him, an' I tell you, ef they have me up 'fore Moun' Zion, hit 'll be er bad day fur Moun' Zion." She shook her clinched fist at him.

Parson Riley was half Irish, a little Welsh, and the rest American. Besides, he was young and inexperienced.

"Your case will be up next Sunday morning. You can come or not, as you please." He said this with a somewhat unclerical but very natural emphasis, and, turning on his heels, left the spot. The last words he heard were, "I ain't 'feard o' you ner all the Moun' Zions in the world."

As Parson Riley mounted his mare, Colonel Tod-

hunter crawled through the hedge a few yards off, looked cautiously around, secured his pipe from the porch, and went back silently the way he came. A smile forced itself upon the lips of the young preacher, and a little farther down the road he laughed outright.

III.

SUNDAY morning brought an enormous crowd to Mount Zion Church, as the village edifice was called. This was natural, as on that day the Presiding Elder was to deliver a sermon, and a visit from the Presiding Elder of the district always drew a crowd. But the fact noised about throughout the land, that Sister Todhunter had been summoned and was to be tried, also operated powerfully as an assembling factor, and many people who had long neglected their church duties put in an appearance. Farmers for miles around came bringing their wives and daughters in their wagons. Young men in buggies with their sweethearts were numerous, and the grove about the church was full of vehicles and "tied-out stock" when service time arrived.

About 10 o'clock a sudden movement around the doorway indicated that preaching was about to begin, and the congregation filed slowly within, the men to the left, the women to the right. Parson Riley, sitting in the pulpit with the portly form of Elder Hamlin beside him, watched with an abiding interest the faces of the comers. When the last was in and settled, he heaved a deep sigh of relief,— Sister Tod-

hunter was not present; she was going to remain at home and let the trial go by default.

He did not know Sister Todhunter!

Elder Hamlin at last arose, his red countenance glowing like a beacon above the sea of faces, and in a voice like a trumpet's opened the meeting with prayer. He asked Divine blessing upon Mount Zion, Sweetwater, and the remainder of the world, invoking a helping hand for "the b-r-r-r-a-v-e young soldier of the cross" who had "come among these people to battle for the right," and upon "the young woman, just buddin' into matoority," who had "come to share his trials and minister with him." His prayer concluded with an appeal in behalf of the erring sister whose wrong-doings they were about to consider.

"May she be led to see the error of her way," he said, "an' turn her feet into the strait an' narrow path." And he thanked the Lord for the assurance given in those lines which declare that

> "while the lamp holds out to burn
> The viles' sinner may return."

Elder Hamlin ceased, and amid the shuffling of feet that followed the deep "Amen" which rolled from the prompt "Amen corner" back into the dilatory recess beyond the last post, the congregation resumed their seats. Then Parson Riley stepped forward, and in

the clear debating-society tones his wife loved so well, read the opening hymn:

> "From Greenland's icy mountains,
> From India's coral strand."

Elder Buckner stood up in advance of the congregation and raised the tune in a strong baritone that at once sprang out boldly and challenged the whole assembly. He was instantly pursued and overtaken by Mrs. Culpepper's soprano; and Mrs. Buckner's sweet contralto soon found an entering place. After her came the deep bumble-bee bass of Colonel Ledbetter, who adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses as he came in. This was the customary opening. No one in Sweetwater would have dreamed of invading the melody with any sort of a voice until Elder Buckner, Mrs. Culpepper, Mrs. Buckner, and Colonel Ledbetter had obtained a fair start. Any one so imprudent would have drawn the attention of the whole congregation upon himself. But, the quartette well under way, everybody was at liberty to rush in; and so on this occasion, soon, borne aloft by the united voices of the entire congregation, the grand old melody sailed out and swept far away down the pine aisles into the peaceful Sabbath heart of the woodlands.

The last tone died away—as usual it was the deep hum of Colonel Ledbetter's bass, which refused to be quieted for a while. Then the congregation sank

into their seats, and Elder Hamlin stood up and delivered a powerful sermon upon the wife and her true position.

Then came the long-looked-for moment.

Parson Riley had descended from the pulpit to state the business of the hour, which every one awaited with feverish impatience, when a form filled the doorway, and Sister Todhunter, in holiday attire of red silk, black lace, and a great flower-ladened flare-front bonnet, stood before him. As by instinct everybody knew she was there, and every head save one was turned toward her. She paused long enough to survey the crowd contemptuously, then, with a great waddle, she marched up the aisle, took a chair out from under little Major Brown almost before he could vacate it, placed its back against the pulpit, and sat down.

"Now," she said, looking at Parson Riley, while she adjusted the folds of her dress, "go on with yer lies; I'm ready." Parson Riley turned pale, and then red. Some of the thoughtless young people snickered, and there was a general stir of expectation. Colonel Ledbetter, without unbending a particle of his enormous and ever-blooming dignity, looked at Major Brown and winked with both eyes. Brown put his hand over his mouth and coughed violently. But the parson soon rallied, and, turning to the congregation, said firmly:

"Brothers and sisters, for such you are in the holy union of the church, and I trust soon to say in the affection born of joint and self-sacrificing labors, I have a painful duty to perform this morning, one that I fain would avoid, but ——"

"Oh, shucks, say what yer got ter say and don't palaver so much." This, of course, came from Sister Todhunter. He paused a second for the new sensation to subside, and without looking at her he continued:

"It is a duty, and of such there can be no avoidance without guilt."

"Very pretty. Be'n all the week er-learnin' hit?"

"I am called upon to present to you this morning an erring sister," he continued, linking his hands together and bowing them before him palms downward while he rocked back upon his heels and brought his toes to the ground again, "who, not satisfied with violating at home the proprieties of the domestic circle and the commands and precepts of the Scriptures, has come into the house of the Lord defiant and rebellious, with sneers upon her lips and contempt for His minister and His people in her heart. The evidence of this latter is before you; of the former, her husband, a gentleman whom you all know, will speak."

Colonel Todhunter was sitting on the front seat at the elbow of Parson Riley, his chin upon his shirt-

front, and deep dejection written in every line of his face. There was also a pallor there. He was probably the only person in the church who had not seen or heard his wife enter. The parson was forced to rouse him with a touch.

"Get up, Colonel," he said, "and state your case."

"Hey?" The parson motioned to a spot in front and then to the sea of expectant faces turned toward him. He understood, and sidled along with his white face to the crowd, his blue eyes searching every bench, until he reached the place indicated; then he folded his poor white hands together and drew a long breath of relief: Sister Todhunter was not in sight. He opened his mouth to speak, when an event occurred that threw the crowd present into the most intense excitement. In moving to the front Colonel Todhunter came within four or five feet of his wife, to whom his back was half turned. He had just satisfied himself that he was secure, and had said "I," when Sister Todhunter leaned forward, extended her crooked handled umbrella its full length, deftly hooked it in the collar of her husband's coat, and with one jerk landed him backward and head-first into her lap. So sudden was the act, so utterly unexpected, that everybody for an instant paused and gazed in open-mouthed astonishment. Then those in the rear tumbled over each other for better positions, and big Elder Hamlin

rushed to the colonel's assistance. The angry woman met the rescuer with such energy that his alarmed neighbors were compelled to lead him outside and pour water on his head.

In the mean time Major Brown, Colonel Ledbetter, Elder Buckner, Mr. Culpepper, and others were struggling to release Colonel Todhunter, whose convulsive play of legs and awful expression of face indicated approaching dissolution. The united strength of six men was sufficient at last to effect this, and the colonel, all breathless, arose.

"Are you hurt much, Colonel?" shouted good Mrs. Buckner, who had crowded to the front. With one hand on his head and the other struggling for his handkerchief, which was in the wrong coat-tail pocket, and with tears rolling down his cheeks, he replied softly:

"I had only a little hair left, gray hair, madam; I fear she has pulled that out, too."

The hubbub was indescribable, and everybody was crowding to the front. Parson Riley waved them back.

"Sit down," he shouted. "We can't do anything so long as you stand up!" All dropped back into their seats, except about a dozen of the most trustworthy and dignified churchmen around the refractory sister, who with a strong grip on the edge of her chair was holding her position, while she talked to the men nearest her.

"You think yerself mighty smart, don't yer?" she said, catching Parson Riley's eye. "An' yer wife — my! ain't she stuck up, with her lace curtains an' tea-parties! Too proud ter invite *me*, but not too proud ter invite old Jane Gramby, whose boy stole a mule." There was a shriek in the audience, and Mr. Gramby, standing near, hurried to his wife.

"An' there 's Tom Culpepper. *He 's* er pretty nice one to be settin' hisse'f up fur er church-cleaner. I saw him pass my house so drunk las' week he did n't know if he was goin' home er comin' back." Again the thoughtless giggled. Tom Culpepper's habits were certainly unfortunate.

"An' there 's Brother Spikes. He 's er good han' ter weed out er church, ain't he? An' his cotton in the grass so bad that yer can't see hit from the road." Again a subdued applause from the great audience.

"This is simply outrageous," said Brother Spikes to Mr. John Edgerly hotly; "that woman ought to be ducked."

"Ought she, indeed!" said Sister Todhunter, catching the remark. "Then you better git John Edgerly ter help you. His gra'ma was ducked for tattlin', en I reckon he 'll know how ter go about hit." This terrible dig drew all eyes upon Edgerly, and he turned as red as a turkey-comb.

"Madam," said Colonel Ledbetter, advancing to a prominent position in all the dignity and confidence

of his high standing in Sweetwater, "I trust you will let your old friend advise you."

"When did you come to be my old friend?" she replied with terrible sarcasm. "Was hit when yer charged me twelve per cent. for the loan of er hundred dollars, or was hit when you made me pay for er hundred bushels of corn because my mule et five?" Taking his hat and cane, the colonel walked outside and sat down on a stump.

"Gentlemen," said Parson Riley suddenly, seeing his force rapidly falling away, "the only thing to do is to carry her out and send her home. If you will all take hold we can carry her out quickly." The men were ready for any escape from the merciless lashing the woman was giving them. With a rush they seized her, chair and all, she fighting desperately, and bore her outside. After a brief rest, during which the assaulting party repaired damages, they lifted her again and made for the wagon. The rail fence furnished her a hold when they tried to lift her over, and it became necessary to take it down. Then another fierce struggle ensued at the wagon. Finding herself overmatched, Sister Todhunter gave vent to a shrill scream that brought Colonel Todhunter to her side in repentance and alarm. He attempted to soothe her, but she was no sooner lifted into the wagon than she kicked the dash-board off and seized him by the ear. It took the efforts of the crowd again to release him.

"Elder Hamlin overboard."

Elder Hamlin, who had recovered his wind and rallied, here climbed into the wagon with the others to help hold her, while the rest hitched up her mules. Then, led by Billy, her ten-year-old son, who had watched the proceedings in sullen silence, the strange load moved off, a delegation accompanying it to keep things straight. As they crossed the creek, Sister Todhunter by a sudden movement managed to throw Elder Hamlin overboard. He stood up in the water and swore a great round oath that horrified everybody. But Sister Todhunter laughed hysterically.

"Put him out, put him out er Moun' Zion too! Don't yer hear him er cussin' back there?" Elder Hamlin had retired to the bank, and was denouncing the whole race of obstreperous women, but not swearing. His one oath was confessed in open meeting afterward, and willingly forgiven.

This, however, was Sister Todhunter's last effort. She was seized with a collapse on reaching home, and begged to be placed on the grass. There sitting, she declared that death was near, and begged them to leave her. Her husband came up and ministered to her, and she was heard to ask Billy to lead her to the well, as she wanted to jump in and end her misery; and Billy told her he wished she would. Then the committee returned. It transpired afterward that Sister Todhunter rallied enough to go into the house, and, in a sudden return of her passion, slammed

the door on the neck of Colonel Todhunter, who incautiously looked in, and held him a prisoner until a mutual understanding was effected. As may be well understood, the terms were not liberal for Colonel Todhunter.

IV.

OF course Sister Todhunter was summarily expelled from the church. The affair furnished Sweetwater with a sensation for several weeks, but by and by it grew to be an old topic, and Sister Todhunter could venture into town upon her shopping without attracting universal attention and comment. She was a cash customer, a fact that helped wonderfully to gain her defenders, and, besides, many people regarded her as victorious in the church fight, and enjoyed the way she laid about her. But there was no friendship between the female side of Sweetwater and Sister Todhunter. She had talked too plainly.

READER, did you ever see a baby fade away without apparent cause, baffling the oldest physicians and wringing the very life from its mother, hour by hour, day by day?—watch its poor little face grow old and pinched, and its great eyes grow brighter until they seemed to burn like candle-flames in the empty sockets? So faded the little babe that nestled in the depths of its soft nest when the parson's wife showed

the assembled matrons of Sweetwater her laces and curtains in the shadowed room back of the parlor. Day by day the mother sat in her low rocker, her tender eyes upon the wasting form, a fever in her own brain, and a weight upon her heart that had driven out every tear-drop and left her powerless to weep. By day and by night she sat there, bathing the babe in the dry grief of despair. The little frame lay bared before her — legs of a thimble's thickness, with the skin crumpled upon them, arms that were the arms of a doll, and hands that scarce checked the light that fell upon them when the mother lifted them again and again in her mute despair.

The doctor had yielded up hope: save one or two, the neighbors, worn out, had withdrawn; and to-day, the day of which I write, the mother sat waiting for the rustle of the angel's wing.

As there she sat, suddenly the doorway was darkened, and Sister Todhunter from the mountain of her awful presence looked down upon the scene.

"Why hain't you sent fur me?" she said bluffly. Parson Riley's wife looked up and then back again. She did not comprehend that she was addressed. Sister Todhunter looked at the baby. Then she ran her hands under it gently and raised it, pillow and all. 'T was but a feather's weight. The mother yielded meekly, and fastened her eyes anxiously upon the great rescuer who had arrived.

"I 've seen many er sicker kitten 'n this git well."

"Is there any hope?" she asked humbly.

"Hope?" Sister Todhunter gave her a look of scorn. "I should say so! I 've seen many er sicker kitten 'n this git well. Go git me some mullein."

"Mullein?"

"Yes, mullein. Don't yer know mullein when you see hit?" Parson Riley's wife shook her head sadly.

"I have never seen any," she said.

"Well, go an' tell the cook ter bring me some. Lord, what sorter women will the nex' set be! Never seen mullein!" But the mother was gone, and the lady who had been keeping her company turned up her nose and silently followed her. The cook had heard of mullein, fortunately, which grows wild in all Georgia, and soon appeared with some.

"So," said Sister Todhunter contentedly when she saw it. "Now go make some strong tea outer hit. Make hit with milk." The cook hurried away. Everybody seemed to gain life when Sister Todhunter took command. The tea soon arrived, and the new nurse administered a couple of teaspoonfuls.

"He can't retain anything a moment," said the mother; "it is no use to torture him any more."

"Will yer hush?" Sister Todhunter almost shouted the question. "Don't yer reck'n I 've seen er sick baby 'fore now?"

Parson Riley's wife "hushed" and became a mute observer. The child retained the food, and presently

Sister Todhunter gave it more. The second time its eyes were fixed upon the cup, and its little lips were feebly raised to meet it. It drank half a cupful, then turned its face on Sister Todhunter's broad knee and slept. Seeing this, a great hope grew in its mother's heart, and peered like an imprisoned spirit through her anxious eyes. Metaphorically, she began to lean upon the vast figure by her side, which seemed so confident and resourceful.

"Lay down," said Sister Todhunter bluntly, looking up into the face fixed so hungrily upon hers. The young woman's eyes grew wistful and beseeching.

"I can't sleep," she said, "and my baby dying." Sister Todhunter gave her a peculiar look.

"Of all the fools!" she began, then changed her mind. "Lay down right there on the bed an' watch me. The baby ain't er-dyin'." And moved by some strange power the mother obeyed.

The baby slept. One, two, three, four hours passed. Then it waked. The warm mullein and milk was ready, and it drank again. Again it slept, and the mother lying there silently drifted away into dreamland too, for the first time in many days, and slept the sleep of exhaustion.

Thus Parson Riley found them in the almost soundless twilight, when, hurrying back from the deathbed of a distant friend who had sent for him, he

tiptoed into the room. If he had been confronted with Beelzebub himself he could not have been more astonished. He gazed upon the sleeping wife and burly nurse, in whose broad lap slumbered the little one he loved better than life, but whom, as he rode homeward through the lonely pine-lands, he had yielded up to its Maker. His face flushed. The woman raised one hand, swept a glance over the two sleepers, and then motioned to the door. Parson Riley bent his head and noiselessly passed out. He stood among the jasmines at his gate, with his pale face turned up to the blue sky, which seemed so near him there, making no sound; and it seemed to him as he waited that a mystery was unfurled about him, and he grew and broadened under its touch.

Still the suns glided by, but the child lived — lived and grew strong. One day Colonel Todhunter drove the mules up to the front door and halted them. Sister Todhunter placed the infant in its mother's lap and said:

"Keep him on mullein and milk a while longer. He 's all right now. — Shet up!" she added, seeing the mother's eyes fill with tears and her bosom heave; "an' if yer need me, sen' down."

"You saved my child," sobbed Parson Riley's wife, "and I 'll pray for you always."

"Me saved him! That 's er pretty thing fur er preacher's wife ter say! The Lord did it, chile,—

the Lord and his mullein tea." She nearly crushed the life out of Parson Riley in her hurry to get out.

"Madam," he began, seizing one of her hands.

"Shet up!" she replied, snatching it away. He looked at her beseechingly.

"Won't you let me thank you?" he said; "and — won't you let me say something about that other matter?"

She laughed. "Not now, Parson. I'm goin' home, an' the Lord knows how I will find things there, fur 'twixt Billy and Mr. Todhunter the chances fur the'r goin' wrong is the bes' in the worl'. But, Parson, you *can* study on supp'n. When yer go ter turn ernother woman out er church, don't yer go ter the neighbors fur her character, nor ter her husban', if he happens ter be a triflin' kind er man; but come straight to headquarters. Trouble and worry sometimes sorter crusts over er woman's heart, so that ev'ybody can't see hit, Parson, but hit 's there all the same." She got upon the block and clambered into the wagon, where in deafness sat her liege lord. "Good-bye, Parson," she said, as they drove off. "I'm glad ther baby 's mendin'. Keep him on mullein tea." The parson lifted his hat.

"God bless you, madam," he said tearfully. He watched them as they rolled down the lane. The wheel struck a stump.

"Did anybody ever see sech er man?" he heard her shout. "Gimme them lines!" He saw the colonel rock violently as the reins were wrenched out of his hands, and then his patient little hairless head with its broad ears settle down between his shoulders again. Presently a turn in the road hid them from sight.

"DE VALLEY AN' DE SHADDER."

I.

LOG hut with a stack chimney, at the foot of a long, low hill where the path that winds around it disappears under a great spreading black-gum; another log hut with a stack chimney, over by a belt of pine woods; and another of like build beyond, where a group of water-oaks marks a bend in the swamp; and others still, right and left in the distance, until the number runs up into the dozens — this is Black Ankle. But not all of it. Yonder are a shed and a corn-crib, and a leaning stack of fodder, and a blue-stem collard patch, and snake fences, and vehicles that have stood in the weather until sunstruck; a forlorn mule; a cow that all her life has evidently practiced the precept, "It is better to give than to receive"; a stray hen with her little family under a gorgeous sunflower — this is Black Ankle.

But hold! There are little negroes in single garments that reach to their knees only, and the ten-

year-old girl bearing in her arms the infant. There are the clothes fluttering on the knotted lines propped up by fork saplings. There are black women, with tucked-up dresses, scrubbing over the wash-tub, and in the air the marvelously mellow plantation hymn, and on the ground the shadow of the circling hawk, and the grasshopper balancing himself in mid air, and the dipping mocking-bird on the haw-bush. Ah, now indeed is this Black Ankle!

The sun had gone down, and the shadows were creeping out of the swamp, veiling Black Ankle. All the poverty sign-boards were buried in the gloom, and where the cabins stood fiery eyes twinkled through the night. But under the great black-gum, where the spring gushed, a pine-knot fire blazed merrily, piling up the shadows and painting in waving light the cabin front. The little porch, over which ran the morning-glory and the cypress-vine, stood forth as though projected by the brush of a mighty artist. From every direction, by every path, there came dusky figures, the simple children of the soil, filling the air with songs and laughter, and passed into the light. In a chair upon a table, his back against the black-gum, sat a little wrinkled fiddler with his battered instrument under his chin, the bow twisting and sawing. And by his side, drumming on the strings with a straw, stood a boy, who ever and anon turned his head to laugh at some gay sally from

the company gathered upon the smooth and well-trodden ground. A favorite dancer exhibited his skill until breathless, and was turning away amid the plaudits of the crowd when a young woman forced her way in, crying:

"Git erway, niggers; lemme come!" The crowd shouted, "Lou, Lou!" "Lou 'll knock de shine off er 'im." "You got ter shuffl' now, Beeswing."

The teeth of the young man who beat with the straw shone whiter and broader as a short, active girl broke into the circle. Beeswing grinned.

"Come back, nigger," she cried. The crowd laughed again, and as the girl's feet began to keep time with the music, a dozen hands patted upon as many thighs, and a voice, to which the chorus replied, added words to the strains of the fiddle, the dancer adapting her steps to the hints given:

"Shuffl', littl' Lou;
Pretty littl' Lou;
Same as you;
Pretty littl' Lou;
My gal too;
Pretty littl' Lou;
Forwood too;
"Pretty littl' Lou;
Come 'long, Lou;
Pretty littl' Lou;
Back step, Lou;
Pretty littl' Lou;
Pretty littl' Lou;
Look at Lou!"

The dancer held her dress back and "walked around," turning her toes in, and the crowd laughed. But the song continued:

"Pretty littl' Lou;
Pretty littl' Lou;
Cross-step Lou;
"Pretty littl' Lou;
Balunce too;
Pretty littl' Lou."

The girl whirled around amidst a cloud of cotton, revealing her ankles, and the leader started the laugh by chiming in, followed by the refrain, again:

"Oom oom oo;
Pretty littl' Lou;
Short dog Lou;
Pretty littl' Lou;
Pidgin wing Lou;
Pretty littl' Lou;
"See yer froo;
Pretty littl' Lou;
Turkey trot Lou;
Pretty littl' Lou;
Shuffl', littl' Lou;
Pretty littl' Lou."

Beeswing broke out of the circle, and the dance ended amid the shouts of the company.

The tune changed. Old Morris, the fiddler, began a quaint march, and two by two the dancers promenaded around, the clear voices of the women leading the song:

"Turn 'er high, turn lady,
Turn lor'.
Turn dat lady Cymlin;
Turn 'er high, turn lady,
Turn lor'.
Turn dat lady 'roun'."

The men turned their partners with one hand held overhead, and "the lady" spun until her dress swelled out like a balloon. Then she bowed and the men patted quick time, all singing, while their partners sprang to the center and danced:

"Knock candy, Candy gal;
Knock candy, Candy gal;
No harm to knock candy;

"Littl' in de wais' an' pretty in de face;
No harm to knock candy;
Two ways to knock Candy gal;
No harm to knock candy."

Again came the quaint song, "Turn 'er high, turn lady"; again the slow march, and again the whirl. This time the men sprang to the center, and old Morris, sweeping his head to his knee, struck up a breakdown, to which the women sang:

"You sif' de meal, you gimme de husk;
You bake de bread, you gimme de crus';
You bile de pot, you gimme de grease;
Ole Kate, git over;
Git over, old Kate;
Git over!"

Several verses followed, first the women dancing, then the men, ever returning to the promenade song.

Dance followed dance, jig, shuffle, song, and refrain, and the hours glided by. A tiny silver crescent was the moon, but it had long since sunk behind the hill. Old Morris nodded, but his bow kept moving. "Wake up, old man," shouted a voice as the rout went round. "Hush yo' mouf, nigger," he answered back. "Dis fiddle knows me, an' hit 'u'd keep er-singin' ef I uz to go plum ter sleep"; and the livelier wave in "Sallie Gooden," which the interruption had stimulated, faded away into monotony again.

So went the night. But a gaunt spectre stood unseen on the black bank of shadows piled up be-

yond the gumtree. Into these old plantation dances, harmless once and picturesque, had come, with the new freedom, a new element. On the porch in the shadow, where he had rolled over unnoticed, stupid with drink, lay Ben Thomas, the host. A heavy, brawny negro, he seemed some fifty years old when the stirred logs flashed a light upon him. At the far end of the little porch his young mulatto wife was tossing small coins in a circle of men, who applauded when she won and were silent when she lost. Suddenly the game ended, the woman empty-handed.

What stirred the sleeper? Who can tell? But stir he did, then waked, and gazed about him. The last throw of the coin attracted his attention. He felt in his pocket; then letting his feet to the ground he staggered forward and supported his wavering form against a post.

"Mandy," he said gently, and he seemed to sober as he spoke, "did you tek my money?"

"Yes," she laughed, "I did." Her tones were careless and defiant.

"Whar hit, Mandy?"

"Whar you reck'n?"

"Whar hit, Mandy?" The man's voice was still calm. Silence had fallen on the group.

"Los'."

"Oh, w'at yer mekin' er fuss erbout er littl' money fur? Ain' er man's wife got er right ter hit ef hit 's

his'n?" The speaker was a low-browed, vicious-looking negro, Mandy's late opponent. Ben did not notice him, but returned to his query:

"Who got dat money, Mandy?"

The gambler contemptuously threw three silver quarters into her lap, for she was still sitting.

"Heah, Mandy, I len' you nuff ter pay 'im. Dern er man w'at 'll 'buse es wife 'fo' folks, an' en 'er own house." The gambler looked around for indorsement, but got none. All eyes were upon the husband. He stooped forward and took the coins, placing them in his pocket.

"No man kin len' money ter my wife," he said gently, for the first time addressing the gambler; "an' hit ain' len'in' w'en money w'at 's stole comes back."

"Who stole hit? Who stole hit?" A savage look gleamed in the gambler's eye.

"Fuss she stole hit," said the husband, "an' den you stole hit; fur ter cheat er ooman es des same es stealin'."

Quick as the spring of a panther was the movement of the gambler as he threw himself upon the now sober man who had accused him. There was a brief struggle; the gambler clasped one hand over his breast and staggered. A knife dropped from under his hand as he suddenly extended his arm, and with a deep sigh he sank lifeless in his tracks.

The crowd opened, letting the red firelight flood the

scene. Ben stood with folded arms, gazing upon the corpse, but like a shadow falling, the woman glided from her low perch by the prostrate figure and snatched the bloody knife from the ground. For an instant she crouched, her yellow face upturned to her husband, a strange light in her eyes, and her long black hair tumbling down upon her shoulders. She seemed about to spring at his throat. But only for an instant. The knife vanished in the folds of her dress, and she pointed straight into the black depths of the swamp.

"Run, run!" she whispered. Ben gazed about him defiantly, then turned and strode away into the shadow. None pursued. His arms dropped as he disappeared, but no eye was strong enough to follow and see the faint flash of light that trembled for an instant upon the steel in his hands, like the glimmer of a glow-worm through the texture of a dead leaf.

The woman still crouched by the corpse, but she saw it not. Her eyes were fixed upon the shadow that had closed over her husband. Horror and fear seemed to have frozen her. The wondering group discussed the tragedy, and constructed a rude litter for the dead. But as they bore the body off, a man approached her and asked to see the knife. She turned her yellow face to his for an instant, then bounded by him and was swallowed up in the swamp. Forward she went through brake and bramble. A

great gnarled oak reached out to stop her, but in vain; and from the grasp of the bushes that clutched her she rushed madly. Suddenly the silent stretch of a great lagoon was before her. She lifted her arm and frantically hurled the knife far out into the night. No sound came back, though she held her breath until her eyes started from their sockets. But yes, at last — a far, faint splash, as when a cooter glides from his log and seeks his couch in the slime below.

"Ben!" she whispered, "Ben!" There was no answer. "Ben!" This time it was a scream. A thousand echoes darted here and there in the sounding swamp, and as they died away a strange, sad sigh was wafted out of the depths. Turning, she fled back to life, pursued by a host of terrors. How she reached it she knew not, but presently she fell prostrate upon the floor of the cabin. Crouching there in the shadow was the aged form of her husband's mother, crooning to his babe. Neither spake, and lying on her face the young woman spent the remaining hours of the night. But ever and anon she heard the splash of the knife in the waters, the echoes calling "Ben," and that strange, sad sigh of the spirit as it left the dead man's body.

II.

WEEKS passed. The little brown baby fell to the care of its grandmammy. A spell was upon Mandy. With her long hair down upon her shoulders, elbows upon her knees, and face in her hands, she sat by the hour under the great black-gum, gazing down into the shadowy depths of the swamp. With an intuition and refinement of kindness not uncommon to the race, the elder woman kept silent upon the events of that dreadful night. Not once did she refer to the tragedy, not once to the wild life of the young wife of which it was the culmination,—wild, for it had been the same old story of mismated ages and foolish playing with fire. Quietly she had gone on doing the cooking and the washing, and the little brown baby, as she toiled, played with its rag doll, and preached to the sleepy cat. When the baby cried for food she placed it in its mother's arms, where, as it lay, Mandy studied the round face vaguely. But no tear fell upon the child, and the old mammy wondered as she watched the two.

"Mandy ain' come 'roun' yit," she said to a neighbor once. "De Lord es 'flictin' her mighty hebby;

but she 'll come bimeby, she 'll come bimeby." Yet the time seemed long.

One day, as thus they sat, the Rev. Kesiah Toomer, or "Unc' 'Siah," as he was called, leaned over the split-oak picket. His aged face, full of wrinkles, and its white eyebrows, beamed down kindly upon them.

"Mornin', Aunt Charlotte," he said, touching the battered old straw hat that kept the sun from his bald head and its kinky fringe of snowy hair; "how you do des mornin'?" His was a soft, flexible voice, full of conciliatory curves.

"I 'm toler'ble," replied the woman simply.

"How Mandy?"

"She 's toler'ble." The young woman was dreaming into the depths, and heard nothing.

"How littl' Ben?"

"He 's toler'ble."

"How Sis' Harriet?"

"She 's toler'ble."

"Yes 'm." Unc' 'Siah's face mellowed a little more, and he shifted his weight to the other foot.

"How you, Unc' 'Siah?"

"I 'm toler'ble, bless God!"

"How Phyllis?"

"She 's toler'ble."

"The chillun all got well?"

"Yes 'm, dey all toler'ble."

"Won't yer come en an' res'?"

Unc' 'Siah replied by limping slowly into the yard. He had a leg that was stiff with rheumatism and gave him a painful-looking gait. He seated himself in the splint-bottom chair proffered him. For some time he was silent. Every now and then his eye rested upon the sleeping child and the brooding mother. Charlotte knew that he had something to say.

"You seen Ben?" she asked quietly. The old man stirred in his seat.

"Yes'm," he said; "seen him yestiddy." There was a slight change in the face of Mandy; no movement, but the eyes seemed to lose their far-away look and fix themselves on something nearer.

"W'at 'e say?"

"Well," replied the old man, thrusting out his stiffened limb, "he ain' say much. Hit 's mighty nigh unto fo' weeks sence he uz put en jail, an' dey es gointer have es trial next Chuesday." Then presently: "You bin deir, Mandy?" Mandy turned her hunted eyes upon him.

"Yes," she whispered, after awhile; "an' he druv me 'way." Silence fell upon the little group. The old woman was studying the face of the man, turned towards the ground. The other had sunk again into hopelessness above the baby. Presently Unc' 'Siah spoke:

"He do say dat dem lyyers 'low dat deir 's mighty littl' chance fur 'im 'less 'n dat knife er Bill's 'd been

picked up by somebody w'at uz leanin' ter our side er de case, 'cause Bill's name uz on hit, ef hit uz Bill's, an' 'u'd show fur hitse'f. Plenny uv 'em seed Mandy snatch hit fum de groun', an' sum ses es how et uz Ben's an' she uz erfeard ter show hit, an' sum ses es how hit uz Bill's an' she uz er-hidin' hit 'cause she liked Bill more 'n Ben; an' so hit goes. Now, ses I, deir ain' nuth'n' en dat, an' Mandy 'll sw'ar in de court-house she flung hit en de swamp fur Ben's 'thout lookin' at hit,—des like you say, honey,—but dey 'low, does dem lyyers, es how Mandy, bein' de prisoner's wife, can't sw'ar en de case. But ef de knife uz deir, ses dey, hit 'u'd tork fur hitse'f, 'cause deir ain' no 'sputin' de name, an' Sam Toliver an' Bob Johnsin knowed hit by sight. You could n't fin' hit, you reck'n, Sis' Mandy?" The woman shuddered. "No," she said, "I bin deir en the day, but de place es changed fum en de night; an' et night,—I can't go deir, Unc' 'Siah! I can't go deir! An' hit ain' no use ter go en de dark, an' hit en de water." Unc' 'Siah was silent a moment. Presently he added:

"Ben ses, ses he, 'Ef Marse Bob uz heah hit 'u'd be all right.' But deir ain' no chance now, fur 'e live 'way off yander sebenty odd mile, an' no railroad half way. An' heah 't is er Thu'sday 'bout sundown." Mandy turned her face to his, but his eyes looked away, and he had given himself up to reflection. Presently he said, as if addressing no one in particular:

"My ole Mis' tell me oncst, 'Siah,' ses she, des so, 'w'en de heart es sick an' lonesome deir ain' no med'cin' like work. Ef you got ter set down an' study 'bout hit hit 's gointer eat, es dis heah sickness; but ef you es er-workin', hit gits out into suthin' else.' Lord, but she live up ter hit too; an' w'en Marse Sam uz shot et Chinck'nhominy, es dey say, she tu'n en an' cut up cyarpets fur de sogers, an' knit socks, an' scrape lint twell bimeby hit uz all done; an' one day I seen 'er pickin' cotton in de orchud patch like er common nigger, an' I ses den, 'Ole Mis', hit 's er sin an' er shame fur you ter do like dat.' An' right deir she lif' up 'er han's, dat de sun almos' shine troo, an' say, 'Gimme work ter do, 'Siah; gimme work ter do!' An' lemme tell yer, right deir, too, I broke down. But hit kep' 'er up, an' she ain' dead yit, but as peart as anybody. Yes, sir, work es er big t'ing for hebby eyes."

On the face of the yellow woman over her babe a thought was dawning. A new spirit shone in her eyes, and a quickening breath shook her form. As she gazed upon the old man he took a pair of silver-rimmed spectacles from his pocket and adjusted them. Then he drew out a worn Bible. The woman sank back again, but the thought in her eyes remained.

"Sis' Mandy," said he, "let de Lord speak, fur deir 's trouble in sto' fur you an' yourn." Charlotte rested her chin upon her hand, and her knitting, which she

had drawn out, dropped to the ground. The old man began, but his progress was slow. He had to spell out many words, and explain as he read:

"'*De Lord es my sheppud,' I shall not want.*' Bless de Lord fur dat! 'Shall not want'; you heah dat, Sis' Mandy; not want fur nuth'n'. Don' care w'at hit es, you shall not want hit long, sha'n't keep on er-want'n' hit ef de Lord es yo' sheppud — an' you es one er de flock. No, chile!

"'*He makes me to lay down in green pastures, 'e leads me beside de still waters,*' — yes, Lord, we know w'at dat means fur er sheep, — whar de grass es long an' green an' de water es cole, an' deir es shade all day long; dat 's de place fur yo' sheep an' yo' lam's.

"'*He resto'ith my soul; he leads up de paf er de righteous fur es name' sake.*' Des heah dat! Hit makes no diffunce whar dat paf es er-goin'; by de big road, or ercross de corn-rows, or troo de swamp hitse'f, — he 's gointer lead de way; an' hit 's all de same ef hit 's day or night; hit 's all one wid de Lord.

"'*Yea, though I walk troo de valley er de shadder er death, I 'll fear no devil,*' — no, sir-r-r! No devil gointer hu't you deir, fur deir 's er han' en de shadder, an' hit 's more 'n er match fur *him* and his kind; dat hit es!

"'*Fur thou art wid me, thy rod an' thy staff dey comforts me.*' Oh, yes, chillun, Jesus es deir by de side er de troo berlievers, ef dey only knowed hit. An'

w'en dey es come out er de valley an' de shadder, w'at den?

"'*Thou prepares' er table fur me en de presunce uv my enemies: thou a-n-o-i-n-t-e-t-h my head with oil, an' my cup hit runs over.*' — Dat 'll be er happy day den! Oh, yes, oh, yes, w'en de cup es full de heart es full, an' de eyes dey runs ober, 'cause uv de fullness erway down below; yes, ma'am. W'en dat tayble es spread hit 'll make anybody's eyes run over; barbecued shote, br'iled chicken, fat ham, biscuits, white bread, 'simmun beer, all spread right deir en de presunce er de enemy, de ole devil hisse'f fairly bustin' wid hunger an' spite, but pow'less, 'cause de sheppud es deir ter guard de lam's.

"An' w'en hit's all done w'at ses de prophet? W'en de hard heart done lay down hits load an' de feet been en de valley an' de shadder, an' by de waters an' 'cross de pastures er-fearin' nuth'n', w'at den?

"'*Sholy!*' ses he, '*sholy!*' — oh, hit 's er great word is dat sholy,— '*sholy goodness an' mussy shall foller me all de days er my life, an' I 'll dwell den en de house er de Lord.*' Bless him fur de promise!"

'Siah closed his book, and drew off his glasses, and wiped them carefully upon the lining of his coat. But the young woman stood up with the new thought fairly speaking in her round brown eyes, and a new vigor trembling in her frame.

"Tek de baby, Mammy," she almost shouted, plac-

ing little Ben in the other's lap. "I'm er-goin',—don't you heah?—I'm goin' troo de valley an' de shadder an' by de waters an' cross de pastures twell He show me Marse Bob! I bin bline, Mammy, I bin bline, but I ain't bline now! He done op'n my eyes an' I see de way. Good-bye! Good-bye, Mammy! Good-bye, Unc' 'Siah! Keep de baby en yo' bed, Mammy, en de night, an' don't let 'im cry fur me.—En de valley an' de shadder an' by de pastures!—En yo' bed, Mammy—"

She turned away. Her voice died out as she passed beyond the live-oaks, but like a wind-whisper among the pines it returned once more—"en yo' bed." Then, and then only, did Unc' 'Siah lift up his face from his hands and fix it skyward.

"De Lord he has spoke at las'. Hit 's all right, Sis' Charlotte. De Lord's han' es er-reachin' out fur Ben. Dat es Bill's knife."

Charlotte spoke not. Bending until her head rested against the one ragged garment of the sleeping child, she rocked him in silence. The old man gazed upon her doubtfully, but presently he rose, and in silence too limped out across the field.

III.

On went the young woman, her straight, strong limbs bearing her bravely; on into the great road, on through the village with its lazy groups sitting about in the afternoon shade, on past the jail, never stopping. She moved as one in a trance, and the strange light shone from her eyes.

"'En de valley an' de shadder,' Ben," she shouted, "but er-fearin' nuth'n'. An' I 'm comin' back leanin' on His rod an' His staff; I 'm er-comin' back." People looked at her curiously, but she stopped for none. The shadows fell; night found her on the lonely highway. The tall pines crooned above; it seemed as though a spirit sighed from the lips of the dying man. A whippoorwill called from the depths of the forest; to her it was a voice from the past, and strange things caught at her dress as she glided by.

"'En de valley an' de shadder,'" she whispered, "'an' leanin' on His rod an' staff.'" No moon rose to comfort her, but a mocking-bird sang as he used to sing in the haw-bush by the cabin when the baby was rolling on his back in the sand and she was sewing. On, never faltering; tired of limb, hungry and athirst, but onward still.

At dawn of day she dropped down by a friendly door in the city's suburbs, and told her story. The hospitality of the South animates the humblest dwelling, and the humbler the roof the broader the unquestioning hospitality. Her thirst quenched, her hunger appeased, she dragged her stiffening limbs into a new road, and continued her journey. The sun came forth and parched the ground, but the trees lent her shade here and there. Thirst came back, but the sparkling brook danced across her way. Hunger too came again, yet the hospitable cabin followed it. Night; and sleep, when, far in the night, she sank in a fence-corner murmuring, "'En de valley an' de shadder.'" And as she slept, nothing evil passed the sentinel that there stood guard beside her.

With the dawn the blistered feet resumed their weary way. The history of one day was the history of the next. She started on Thursday; on Monday morning she passed through the great white columns of a princely home, and told her story for the last time; and at 10 o'clock the next morning the trial of Ben Thomas for murder was to begin at Jeffersonville, in Twiggs county, seventy odd miles away.

The evening of the same day found Mandy back in the city, and with her was a gray-haired man — Marse Bob, she called him; and the people who passed him on the street touched their hats to him, and looked back as his tall form went by. A buggy was to bear

him to Jeffersonville in the early morning, but for her there was work yet to be done.

"W'en you pass Black Ankle," she said to him, "I 'll be deir." Before he could stop her she had gone.

Not a voice broke the stillness of the hamlet as she entered among the brooding cabins, save the far barking of Bill Fowler's dog. She had heard that animals see spirits: was he barking at his master's ghost come back again? Her flesh crept, and she almost screamed as she trod unawares on the spot where the man died. There was no light in the little house, no sound: should she enter? The wail of a baby came out to her,— a feeble wail, as of one sick or starving. She laid her hand upon the latch.

"No," she moaned, "not now. Hit 's de las' chance, de las'." She passed down into the black swamp, lying there in the clouded moon like the grave itself.

"'En de valley an' de shadder,'" she whispered, "'an' er-fearin' nuth'n'.'" As she entered there, that other night came back, and its horrors rose about her. There was the bush that clasped her knees, there the crooked tree that barred the way, and there the tangled brake.

Then the lagoon, with its wide, still stretch of water, lay at her feet.

"Ben!" she called; but the name died on her throat. She raised her head again and threw the

knife with all her might,—aye, for the handle seemed in her grasp as hard and bloody as on that fatal night! Yonder it would fall, she thought, straining her eyes to where the black night rested upon the cold, pale sheen of waters, and lo! so it seemed to fall. There came back from the carpeted gloom the same splash! She gasped, and clutched an overhanging vine.

"'En de valley an' de shadder, thy rod an' thy staff, an' er-fearin' nuth'n','" she whispered brokenly; and so, half moaning, she let herself down into the silent water. The chilly flood rose to her armpits, but she moved forward straight into the gloom. Once she stumbled, and the flood rolled over her, but straight on she passed, with a precision seemingly supernatural. As she moved she felt with her bruised and torn feet in the soft ooze and in the slime; slowly and patiently, for she fancied she could tread every foot of the dark depths until the knife was found.

But there is a limit to human progress in Black Ankle Swamp; and just as the spot was reached to which she had calculated that her strength could have hurled the bloody weapon, the ground passed from under her feet. Frantically she clutched at a cypress knee to draw back, when instantly a sharp, swift pain ran along her arm. She had touched a snake, and he had struck his fangs into her clenched hand! She must not lose her hold; she did not. But her lips

opened and sent up one wild, frenzied cry from that dreadful place,—"Oh, my God!"

But what was that? There was no serpent in her grasp; only the long, keen blade of a knife, thrust into the tender cypress. Ignorant and superstitious, her frame trembled with terror; then the truth was upon her. The weapon she had hurled out into the night had stuck where it had struck; the splash was the plunge of a startled cooter. She drew it from its rest and rushed from the place, as when a brown deer, the hounds pressing hard, breaks through the swamp and the cane and the treacherous ooze into the clear fields beyond.

But gone now fatigue! The woman passed the cabin, with its crib and its memories, almost without knowing it, and took the road back to the city. It would have been as well to crouch there and wait for the buggy or to have sought the village, but wait she could not. The fever was upon her; she must move. So she ran cityward to meet the gray-haired rescuer. Mile after mile passed, hour after hour, and still he came not. Day broke, and the sun rose. A prescience of mortal danger was upon her, faintly at first, a terror at last; and mastering the fevered energy of her great struggle, it slew her strength and hurled her by the wayside, to lie with her hunted eyes fixed upon the tree-arched lane overhead.

As thus she lay, an old man riding a flying gray

horse rose in the shadowed light of the lane, and presently burst into the full sunlight there before her. The thundering feet of the animal were almost upon her as she staggered dizzily to her feet and thrust upward the knife. Wonder shone in the face of the rider as, divining the truth, he caught the weapon and passed swiftly from her view. A smile came over her wan face. "'En de valley an' de shadder,'" she whispered feebly, then set her feet towards home.

Tired? Yes, tired near unto death, but leaning upon a rod and a staff that mortal vision could not compass.

IV.

It was a sultry noon, and Jeffersonville was brisk. As Jeffersonville is brisk only during the court week, when the lawyers from Macon ride down to look after the warehousemen's mortgages, and the leading attorneys from the adjoining counties run over to look after the Macon lawyers and attend to the criminal docket, it may be inferred that court was in session.

About the large, white, square frame building with its green blinds and three entrances, little groups of farmers were gathered and many unhitched teams were visible. Within the one great room that takes up the whole of the first floor, and from which ascend steps to the various county offices above, were the usual court-house habitués,—jurors who hope in vain to "get off," and citizens of limited income who yet hope to "get on." In front of the door was the judge's elevated desk, with the clerk lower down, whose feet rested in a chair while his mouth twisted a tooth-pick. The midday meal had just ended, and the court had not reëntered. To the right and left were the jury benches. The front half of the room was devoted to the Bar, which by courtesy included

all leading citizens, and the rear to negroes and the promiscuous crowd on curiosity bent.

Apparently there was nothing exciting on hand just then, though a murder trial had been interrupted by a temporary adjournment. But the defendant was a negro, and a negro murderer is not a novelty. While the court was assembling, the curious might have noted the prisoner's points. His face, if it had any marked characteristics, was noted chiefly for its singularly inexpressive lines, and his attitude was one of supreme indifference. His stout, heavy frame was clad in a common jean suit stained with months of wear, and his kinky hair was liberally sprinkled over with gray. He sat quietly in his place, not even affecting stolidity, but suffering his eyes to roam from face to face as the genial conversation drifted about in the group around him. He was evidently not impressed by any sense of peril, though when the court had adjourned, a clear case of murder had been proved against him, and only his statement and the argument remained.

Slowly the court assembled. The prisoner's counsel had introduced no testimony. A man had been stabbed by his client, had fallen dead, his hand clasped over the wound; and from beneath this hand, when convulsively loosened, a knife had dropped, which the defendant's wife seized and concealed. This had been proved by the state's witnesses.

The prisoner took the stand to make his statement. He declared emphatically that the deceased, knife in hand, had assaulted him and that he had killed him in self-defense; that the knife which fell from the relaxing hand was the dead man's. He told the story simply, and as he began it a tall, thick-set gentleman in a gray suit, with iron-gray hair, and walking with the aid of a stout stick, entered the room and stood silent by the door,— heard him through, losing never a word. As the prisoner resumed his seat the newcomer entered within the rail. He shook hands gravely with several of the older lawyers, and took the hand that the court extended over the desk. Then he turned and, to the astonishment of every one, shook hands with the defendant, into whose face a light had suddenly dawned which resolved itself into a broad, silent grin. This done, the old gentleman seated himself near the defendant's lawyer, and, resting his hand upon his massive cane, listened attentively to the speech.

The speaker was not verbose. He rapidly summed up, and laid his case before the jury in its best light. Really there was not a great deal to say, and he soon reached his peroration. He pictured the blasted home of the poor negro, his wife and babe deprived of his labor, and dwelt long upon the good name he had always borne. In the midst of the most eloquent periods, wherein he referred to the prisoner "sitting

before you, gentlemen of the jury, broken-hearted and borne down by the weight of this horrible tragedy," he turned and extended his hand to where his client sat. A sight met his glance that sent the flush of confusion to his face and started a ripple of laughter around the room. The "broken-hearted" was calmly munching away on an enormous gingercake, the liberal moon in which proved the vigor of his appetite. The eloquence of the speaker was fatally chilled. He stammered, repeated, hesitated, and was lost. After an awkward summing up, he took his hat and books and precipitately retired to a secluded part of the room. He had been appointed by the court to defend the prisoner and had made considerable preparation, even to the extent of training his client when to weep.

The solicitor arose, and with a few cold words swept away the cobwebs of the case. The man had stabbed another wantonly. If the knife was the property of the deceased, why was it not produced in court? — the defendant's wife had picked it up.

He passed the case to the jury, and the judge prepared to deliver his charge, when the old gentleman in gray rose to his feet.

"If your Honor please," he said in a deep tone, the honesty and purpose of which drew every eye upon him, "the prisoner is entitled to the closing, and in the absence of other counsel I beg that you mark my

name for the defense. With the permission of my young friend who has so cleverly stated the defense, I will speak upon the case."

"Mr. Clerk," said the court, "mark General Robert Thomas for the defense." The silence was absolute. The jurymen moved in their seats. Something new was coming. The old gentleman laid his hat and stick upon the table, and drawing himself up to his great height fixed his bright eye upon first one and then another of the jury, looking down into their very hearts. Only this old man, grim, gray, and majestically defiant, stood between the negro behind him and the grave. The fact seemed to speak out of the silence to every man on that bench. Suddenly his lips opened, and he said with quick but quiet energy:

"The knife that was found by the dead man's side was his own. He had drawn it before he was stabbed. Ben Thomas is a brave man, a strong man; he would not have used a weapon on him unarmed!" As he spoke he drew from his bosom a long, keen knife, and gently rested its point upon the table. The solicitor's watchful eye was upon him. The attention of all was gained, and the silence was intense. "It has been asked, Where is the dead man's knife? Let me give you my theory: When Bill Fowler staggered back under the blow of Ben Thomas, clutching his wound, and the knife fell to the ground, the lightning's flash

was not quicker than the change born in a moment in the bosom of that erring woman, the unwitting cause of the tragedy. Up to that moment she had been weak and yielding; she had turned aside from the little home, that should have been her all, to gamble with strange men; to tread the dangerous paths which beset the one safe road a true woman's feet may know. It had thrown a shadow over the humble home; the husband drunk upon its porch was the mute evidence of its presence. In the awful moment of that tragedy, when the dancers stood horrified, this woman became, as by an inspiration, a wife again. Deceived herself, she caught up the tell-tale knife and hurled it into the swamp, destroying the evidence of her husband's innocence when she sought to conceal one evidence of his guilt. This, I say, is a theory. You remember her cry was, '*Run!*'" His listeners stirred, and a whisper went round the room.

"But there is other evidence, gentlemen of the jury. Should I be forced to ask for a new trial, it will be developed that this poor woman, repentant now, thank God! walked in three days from the scene of that tragedy to my home, seventy miles away, to ask my aid and counsel; that, eluding me in Macon, though footsore and weary and crazed with grief, she returned by night to that swamp, and laboring under an excitement as intense as the first, that brought the scene before her so vividly that she was enabled to

find the knife, did find it, and but that an accident to my vehicle delayed me it would have been offered here in evidence ——"

"May it please your Honor," said the solicitor, "much as I dislike to interrupt the honorable gentleman, I do not think it is proper to introduce with the argument evidence that has not been offered upon trial."

"If your Honor please," — and the speaker turned to the prosecuting officer with quiet dignity and gentleness that disarmed him at once, — "a decision upon such a proposition is not needed. I willingly admit what is claimed. But, sir, I offer no evidence, not even this knife, with the name of the deceased upon it, though it comes to me direct from the hand of the woman who, it has been proved, snatched almost from under his hand a weapon when he fell to the ground. I am but arguing a theory to account for the facts that have been proved. But, gentlemen of the jury," — and the knife fell to the table as he turned away from it, — "not upon this theory, not upon these facts, do I base the assertion that the deceased had a knife in his hand when he made the assault, — I speak from a knowledge of men. Ben Thomas would never have stabbed an unarmed man." The General looked around slowly and searched the court-house with his eye, as if daring contradiction. "Why do I say this?" he continued, turning to the court. "Because I know he is as brave a man as ever faced

death; a faithful man; a powerful man, and conscious of his power. Such men do not use weapons upon unarmed assailants." The audience stirred in their seats. The speaker turned again to the jury. "I speak to men who reason. True reasoning with such is as strong as proof. A brave man who is full of strength never draws a weapon to repel a simple assault. The defendant drew when he saw a glittering knife in the hand of his foe,— not from fear, because he could have fled, but to equalize the combat. He was cool and calm; you know the result.

"Why do I say he is brave? Every man on this jury shouldered his musket during the war. Most of you followed the lamented Pickett. Some perhaps were at Gettysburg." Two or three heads nodded assent. "I was there too!" A murmur of applause ran round the room,—the old man's war record was a household legend. It is even said that the court joined in. "I, and the only brother God ever gave me." The veteran bowed his head; his voice sank to a whisper. "A part of him is there yet,"— his hand shook slightly as he moved his cane farther on the desk, and rested upon the Code,—"a part of him, but not all; for, God be praised, we picked up whatever was left of him and brought it back to Georgia.

"I well remember that fight. The enemy stood brave and determined, and met our charges with a courage and grit that could not be shaken. Line

"See, if I speak not the truth!"

after line melted away during those days, and at last came Pickett's charge. When that magnificent command went in, a negro man, an humble African, a captain's body-servant, stood behind it, shading his eyes with his hand, waiting. You know the result. Out of that vortex of flame, and that storm of lead and iron a handful drifted back. From one to another this man of black skin ran, then turned and followed in the track of the charge. On, on, he went, under my very glass, for it was my misfortune to stay behind; on through the smoke and the flame; gone one moment and in sight the next; on up to the flaming cannon themselves. Then there he bent and lifted a form from the ground. Together they fell and rose, and this three times, until, meeting them half-way, I took the burden from the hero and myself bore it on to safety. That burden was the senseless form of my brother,"— here he turned and walked rapidly to the prisoner, his hand lifted on high, his voice ringing like a trumpet,—"gashed, and bleeding, and mangled, but alive, thank God! And the man who bore him out, who came to me with him in his arms as a mother would carry a sick child, himself shot with the fragment of a shell until his great heart was almost dropping from his breast,— that man, O my friends, sits here under my hand! See, if I speak not the truth!" He tore open the prisoner's shirt and laid bare his breast, on which the silent splendor of the

afternoon sun streamed in like a smile from heaven. A great ragged seam marked it from left to right. "Look!" he cried, "and bless the sight, for that scar was won by a slave in an hour that tried the souls of freemen and put to its highest test the best manhood of the South. No man who wins such wounds can thrust a knife into an unarmed assailant. I have come seventy miles in my old age and my sorrow to say it."

It may have been contrary to the evidence, but the jury, without leaving their seats, returned a verdict of "not guilty," and the solicitor, who bore a scar on his own face, smiled as he received it.

"The prisoner," said the court, rapping for order, "is discharged."

"Yes, sah," said Ben, rising and flashing a set of dazzling ivories at the judge. "I knowed hit uz all right soon es I laid eyes on Marse Bob's ole gray head."

He went over and clasped the old Colonel's hand in both of his, giving expression also to a loud laugh. "One mo' time — me an' you, Marse Bob, one mo' time! How Ole Miss gittin' on?" The old man's reply was inaudible; he spoke very gently, and with his chin upon his breast. Ben started back, changed at once. "Dead!" he exclaimed. "Died las' week! Nobody never tole old Ben." His words were heard by all present, who were sharing in his joy,

and silence fell upon the crowd. He regarded his friend mutely for a few moments, then with his hand over his eyes went back to his seat. "Young Marster," he said to a lawyer there, "gimme dat hat down deir on de flo', pleas'!" At the gateway to the inner court, he turned once more and made a rude gesture inclusive of all present. "Judge," he said simply, "an' gemmen, I 'm ve'y much 'bliged ter yer all. Yer stood up ter Ole Marse Bob, an' yer done me er good turn too." He went out with his face averted.

. . . . . .

THE evening shadows gather over Black Ankle. A young woman with a baby at her breast sits, weary of eye and limb, under the spreading gum-tree by the spring. Slowly the yellow rooster leads his followers up the rail to the shed, and the lean cow at the picket-gate lows for entrance. Suddenly out of the valley of the shadow—of death itself—a man comes and rests his hand upon the woman's head. Then the twilight deepens, and we see them no more.

"MINC"—A PLOT.

THE trim little steamboat that plies Lake Harris, the loveliest of all Florida waters, emerged from the picturesque avenue of cypress and trailing moss called Dead River, which leads out of Eustis, and glided as a shadow betwixt sea and sky toward its harbor, fourteen miles away. It had been the perfection of a May day, and the excursionists, wearied at last of sight-seeing, were gathered upon the forward deck. The water-slopes of the highlands on the right, with their dark lines of orange-trees and their nestling cottages, lay restful in the evening shadow fast stretching out toward the boat, for the sun was dipping below the horizon with the stately pines in silhouette upon his broad red face. "Home, Sweet Home," "Old Kentucky Home," and "Old Folks at Home" had been rendered by the singers of the party with that queer mixture of pathos and bathos so inseparably connected with excursion songs, and a species of nothing-else-to-be-done silence settled over the group, broken only by the soft throb of the engine and the swish of dividing waters. Pres-

ently some one began a dissertation upon negro songs, and by easy stages the conversation drifted to negro stories. Among the excursionists sat a gray-haired, tall, soldierly looking gentleman whom every one called "Colonel," and whose kindly eyes beamed out from under his soft felt hat in paternal friendliness upon all.

"It is somewhat singular," he said at length, when there had come a lull in the conversation, "that none of the story-writers have ever dealt with the negro as a resident of two continents. Why could not a good story be written, the scene laid partly in Africa and partly in the South? I am not familiar enough with the literature of this kind and the romances that have been written about our darkies to say positively that it has not been already done, but it seems to me that the opportunity to develop a character from the savage to the civilized state is very fine and would take well. Victor Hugo has a negro in one of his West India romances whose name I forget now—the story used to be familiar——"

"Bug-Jargal," suggested some one.

"So it was. But in this reference is made only to the man's ancestry; and I never thought the character true to life. Hugo did not know the negro."

"But, Colonel, is it not true that these people were the veriest savages, and would it not be too great a strain upon the realistic ideas of the day to venture

into Africa for a hero, especially since Rider Haggard has idealized it?"

"I don't think so. We have no way of ascertaining just how much the imported slaves really knew, but it is a fact that a few were remarkable for some kind of skill and intelligence. They were not communicative, and soon drifted into the dialect of their new neighbors, forgetting their own. I had a negro on my plantation who undoubtedly came from Africa. I was present when my father bought him upon the streets of Savannah, becoming interested in his story soon after he was landed. His mother was described as a sort of priestess—or, as we say, a Voodoo—in her native land, which was near the western coast of Africa, some twelve hundred miles north of Cape of Good Hope. Her influence for evil, it seems, was so remarkable that as soon as possible she was separated from the cargo and sent on to one of the Gulf ports. This fellow was then probably about thirty years old—a little jet-black man with small, bright eyes of remarkable brilliancy. He seemed very glad to go with us, and, I may add, never at any time afterward did he ever give trouble, but did readily what was required of him. He seemed to take a fancy to me from the first, and his love—I say love, for I believe it was genuine affection—gradually extended to all white children. For children of his own color—I won't say race, for in many

respects he differed from the ordinary negro—he entertained the liveliest disgust. Now a story-writer could take that slave and with the help I might give him—his life with us, his peculiarities, powers, certain singular coincidences, and the manner of his death—weave a very interesting romance."

"O Colonel, do tell us the story!" The appeal came in the shape of a chorus from the ladies present, and was at once reënforced by the others. A pair of sweethearts who had been leaning over the bow came slowly back on hearing it, and added their solicitations. The genial old gentleman laughed and looked out upon the waters.

"I did not know I was spreading a net for my own feet," he said. "The story of this fellow would require half a night, even were I able to put it in shape, but I can give a rough outline of some features of it. 'Minc,' as he was called, though his name as near as I can imitate his pronunciation was 'Meeng'r,'—Minc was for a long time a sort of elephant on the family's hands. My mother was a little afraid of him, I think, and the negroes themselves never did entirely overcome their respect for him enough to treat him exactly as one of them, although, as I have intimated, he was perfectly harmless.

"Minc, however, one day exhibited a strange power over animals which is even now a mystery to me. He could take a drove of hogs and by a series of queer

little sounds, half grunts, half groans, reduce them to submission and drive them where he would. Gradually, as the rules for feeding and taking care of them became known to him, he was given charge of the plantation hogs, of which there were five or six hundred, and no small responsibility it was. I remember he at once fashioned him a little instrument from the horn of a yearling; with this he could go into the swamp and by a few notes thereon call them up on the run. That one horn lasted him all his life, and he was with us thirty odd years. He used to wear it hung round his neck by a string, and it was the one possession that the children could not get away from him for even a moment. I think that probably some superstition restrained him.

"Another queer power possessed by Minc was in connection with grasshoppers. I have seen him hundreds of times go into the orchard where the crab grass was tall, and standing perfectly still give forth from his chest a musical humming sound. If there were any big brown grasshoppers within hearing they would fly up, dart about and light upon him. Sometimes he would let me stand by him, and then the grasshoppers would come to me also; but Minc could catch them without any trouble, while any movement from my hand drove them off. Minc," continued the speaker, laughing softly, "used to eat the things,"— exclamations from the ladies,—"and I

Mine's Cabin.

am told that certain tribes in Africa are very fond of them."

"Boiled in a bag and eaten with salt they are not bad," said a young gentleman with the reputation of having been everywhere. "I have eaten what was probably the same insect, though under the name of locusts." (More exclamations.) "Why not?" he added in defense. "Can anything be worse to look upon than shrimps?"

"Well," continued the Colonel, "I soon broke Minc of eating them. The grasshoppers were my favorite bait for fish, and Minc developed into a most successful angler, quite abandoning his cane spear—though, by the way, he was as certain of a victim when he struck as was a fish-hawk. I think the plantation rations also had something to do with his change of diet.

"Well, as Minc's queer powers came to be known he was not greatly sought after by the other negroes. They are slow to speak of their superstitions, but it soon developed that they regarded him as being in league with spirits. He lived in a little cabin down on the creek apart from the others, and there was my favorite haunt, for I was more than delighted with Minc's accomplishments, and Minc was rapidly learning from me the use of many words, which gave me a sort of proprietary interest in him. In time he came to speak as well as the average negro, but he had a

way of running his words together when excited that made him all but unintelligible. I never did get much information from him concerning his former life. He did n't seem to be able to convert terms well enough to express himself. He had lived near great swamps, ate fish, was familiar with the hog—this much I gleaned; and from time to time he would recognize birds and animals and excitedly give me what were evidently their names in his own country. Of course this all came to me at odd times from year to year, and did not make a great impression. I remember, though, that reference to his capture had always a depressing effect upon him, and at such times he would go off about his work. I suppose the memory of his mother was the cause of this; and I soon found that to speak to him of the matter would cost me Minc's company, and so I quit bringing up the subject.

"The things in connection with Minc that puzzled me more were his superstitions. Doubtless they were taught him by his mother, and the first intimation of them I had was when he caught a gopher, and with a bit of wire ground to an exceedingly fine point cut on its shell a number of curious signs, or hieroglyphics, different from anything I had ever seen, except that there was a pretty fair representation of the sun. He then took this gopher back to where he found it and turned him loose at the entrance of his burrow, making gestures indicating that the gopher was going far

down into the earth. He did something of this kind for every gopher he caught. One day he succeeded in snaring a green-head duck, and upon its broad bill he carved more hieroglyphics. This done, to my astonishment, and probably to the duck's also, he tossed the bird high in the air and laughed as it sped away. As the years went by I saw him treat many birds after the same fashion. If there was room for only one or two figures he would put them on, and let the bird go. But as he grew older Minc ate the large majority of his captures, just as any other negro would.

"Well, many years passed away; I grew up and married. By this time Minc was long since a feature of the plantation. My children in time took my place with him, and many 's the ride he gave them in his little two-wheel cart behind the oxen. I should have said before that he used to haul corn to the hogs when in distant fields, and wood for the house-fires on the way back. The negroes no longer feared him, but the negro children would run past his wagon as he plodded along and sing:

'Ole Unc' Minc
Under th' hill,
His eyes stick out
Like tater hill.
Juba dis and Juba dat,
Juba roun' de kitch'n fat,—
Juba ketch er — er ——'

"Oh, well, I forget how the rhyme ran; but Minc would stop every time and hurl a string of words at them which no one could ever exactly translate; and the little brats, delighted at having provoked the outburst, would kick up their heels and scamper off. But along in the war," continued the Colonel, after yielding a moment to a quiet shake of his sides over the recollections trooping up, "Minc filled another office. It was found that by means of a notched stick, scarcely two feet in length, he could keep books, so to say, as well as anybody. I can't, and never will, I reckon, fathom the fellow's system. He often tried to explain it; but when he had finished, you would know just about what you knew at first and be a little confused as to that. But he never was known to make a mistake. Sent into the fields, he would weigh cotton for forty pickers all day and report at night just what each picked in the morning and evening and the sum of all — and all by means of his notches. I am absolutely sure he brought the system from Africa, for no one ever was able to understand it on the plantation, and Minc never lived a day off it. You will see the relation these incidents bear to my first proposition as to imported negroes being simply savages.

"The death of Minc was tragic and surrounded by some remarkable circumstances, and here again comes the story-writer's field. Two years before his death

Mine's Mother.

Minc had caught and tamed a little cooter* about twice the size of a silver dollar. He would hum a queer little tune for his pet, and the thing would walk around the floor for all the world as if he was trying to dance. Then he would come when called, and was particularly fond of sleeping in Minc's dark jacket-pocket, where I suspect he found crumbs. Minc would sometimes throw him into the creek just in front of his cabin, but the little thing would scramble out and get back to the hut again if Minc was in sight; if not, he staid in an eddy close by. You will understand directly why I speak so particularly of this. As the cooter grew larger, Minc amused himself by cutting hieroglyphics all over its back. Into these lines he rubbed dyes of his own manufacture, and the result was a very variegated cooter. The old man carried him almost continually in his pocket; partly, I think, because the animal's antics always amused the children, and partly because he was the cause of Minc's getting many a biscuit. He would frequently come to the house, and sitting on the back porch make 'Teeta,' as he called the cooter, go through with his tricks. These generally resulted in Minc's getting biscuit or cake for Teeta, and in his lying down and letting the animal

* "Cooter," the common name in the South for a species of turtle inhabiting lagoons and streams. The burrowing terrapin is there called the gopher.

crawl into his pocket after it, a feat that closed the performance.

"Well, one day Minc was missing. Everything about his cabin was in order, but he did not return. He never did return. Search was made, of course, and he was finally given up. The negroes dragged the creek, but not with much expectation of finding him, for I am afraid that some of them believed that Old Nick had taken him bodily. But a month afterward my oldest boy was hunting in the big swamp for the hogs, which had become badly scattered since Minc's death, when in crossing a tree that had fallen over one of the many lagoons thereabout whom should he see sitting there but Teeta, watching him with his keen little black eyes, the patch of sunlight he had chosen bringing out the tattoo marks upon his shell. The next instant Teeta dived off the log and disappeared. Tom came home and told of his adventure. Taking a party of negroes, I returned with him and dragged the lagoon. Just where the cooter had dived we found the body of poor old Minc. He had fallen off the log, and becoming entangled in the sunken branches had drowned. And in the rotting pocket of his old jacket we found the cooter hid away."

The Colonel raised his hand as exclamations broke from the party.

"No; you must let me finish. The finding of the cooter was not the most singular thing connected with

the death of Minc. Upon our return home one of the superstitious negroes, greatly to my distress, cut off Teeta's head. He wanted it to place it under his door-step. This was to protect the place from old Minc, of course; but I had the shell cleaned, and the children kept it as a memento of the faithful old slave whom they had dearly loved.

"Relating this story once to an eminent traveler," continued the Colonel, "he suggested that I should send it to the British Museum with its history written out; and going to New York soon after, I carried it with me. It lay forgotten, however, in my trunk, and I did not notice it again until one day I happened to be in New Orleans. There was then in that city an aged negress, claiming to be a Voodoo, and creating considerable stir among the Northern attendants upon Mardi-Gras. I don't know what suggested it, but it occurred to me one day that I would let her look at the shell. It was a mere fancy, or impulse, if you will. I carried it to her. She was, indeed, an old woman, small in stature, and bent nearly double. Without speaking a word, I placed the shell in her hand. She gave one long, fixed look at it, and straightened up as if casting off the weight of half a century. Her lips parted, but she could not speak. Then her form resumed its crook again, and placing her hand against the small of her back, she gasped for breath. With her bright black eyes fixed upon me

she said at last, after a violent struggle, 'Meeng'r!' It was a mere whisper. I spent an hour with the poor old creature, and told her the story of her son's life, for it was undoubtedly he. I gleaned from her that the hieroglyphics upon the shell were taught him by her,—what they signified she would not say,—and that he had written them upon the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, and the inhabitants of the water, that they might be borne to her wherever hid. I never got my shell back: it would have been like tearing the miniature of a dead child from its mother's bosom. And the old woman, when I went to see her next day, had disappeared."

Here the old gentleman arose and went forward.

A BORN INVENTOR.

I.

NANKY GUNNER replaced her rapidly cooling iron before the coals in the great fireplace of her log-cabin, took up a fresh one, spit upon its smooth surface, and, satisfied that the abrupt "teest" that saluted her ear indicated the right temperature, faced her visitor across the ironing-board.

"No, I don't reck'n as how it's posserbul thet airy anuther sech boy do live on the face of the yarth as our Bill. The parson says as how he es er borned inwenter,— whatever thet may be, w'ich mebbe you knows, I don't,— an' ter let 'im sperriment all he wants ter. Er man named Franklelin, he says, would n't er nev'r diskivered Ermeriky 'ceptin' thet he war er sperrimenter, an' ef Collumbus had n't er sperrimented, folks would n't er known to this day

what chain lightnin' 's made outer. Let 'im sperriment, says he, an' let 'im sperriment, says I, an' sperriment he do."

"I 've hearn tell as how Bill 's powerful handy 'bout the house with tools," said Cis'ly Toomer. Dipping her althea mop in the tiny tin box of snuff and restoring it to her mouth, she returned the box to the pocket of her faded calico gown, that was innocent of hoop, underskirt, or bustle, and drooped her shoulders forward comfortably as she lifted her yellow, pinched face. "Sim says as how he made er wooden leg fur Jedge Loomus' mule w'at ther railroad runned over."

Nanky Gunner laughed until her three hundred pounds of avoirdupois quivered vigorously.

"Fact, Cis'ly. Jedge war erbout ter kill ther critter w'en Bill walks up an' lif's his han', so. 'Ef God hed er wanted thet mule killed,' says he, 'he 'd er let ther train kill it dead.' With thet ther Jedge he laughed. 'Mebbe yer kin mek 'im er wooden leg,' says 'e. 'I kin,' says Bill; an' right thar Jedge 'lowed he might have ther critter an' welcome. Well, sho 'nough, Bill tended thet mule, an' while he war er-tendin' uv 'im he war all time inwentin' er leg; an' bimeby he got ther critter propped up an' ther thingermajig stropped on ter 'im. Well, I never seed sech er sight en all my born days. Ef 't had n' be'n fur sorryin' fur ther critter, I 'd er busted wide open.

Ther inwention had er rest fur thet critter's stump, an' er crutch thet caught it somers unner ther shoulder, an' ther strops run all over hit."

"Nanky Gunner, I mus' see thet mule 'fo' I git back ter Putnum—"

"Lor' bless ye, chile, hit 's done dead too long ter talk erbout." Nanky set her iron with a clang upon its ring and began to sprinkle another cotton shirt. "Ye see, Franklelin—thet 's w'at Bill called 'im—Franklelin war used ter wade ther crik down yonder ter there parstyer; an' once ther crik riz powerful, an' Franklelin he tried ter swim across like he used ter 'fo' ther railroad runned over 'im, an' thet 's why he 's dead—'cause somehow he could n't work thet ar peg leg edzactly right, an' they do say as how 'e rolled over an' over, tell bimeby he war drowned an' lef' er-lyin' on 'is back 'ith nuthin' er-showin' but thet ar peg leg er-p'intin' up at ther sky. Our Bill war mighty sorryful, but 'e allus 'lowed ef 'e hed er shod thet wooden foot hit would er be'n diffunt."

One of those silences common to country conversations followed the description of poor Franklin's death, and then Nanky Gunner's thoughts rose to the surface.

"I would n't begin ter name ther things our Bill have inwented. Ther yard an' house es mighty nigh full uv 'em. Some uv 'em won't work, ter be sho, but

Bill allus knows w'at ails 'em, an' sets 'em by ter fix up w'en 'e gits time. He 's er-inwentin' er spring-bucket now thet 'll slide down hill an' fetch 'er full an' back ther same time —"

"Es 'e inwentin' hit right now?" Cis'ly Toomer's voice was lifted in an impressive whisper.

"Right now."

"Lor', how I 'u'd like ter see 'im er-doin' hit."

Nanky Gunner replaced her iron upon the hearth and waddled out from behind her board. She touched her guest upon the shoulder. "Sh-h-h-h!" she whispered, and motioned her to follow. They passed out across the doorless hall into the other room, the boards groaning under Nanky's tiptoe gait, until they reached the wall by the fireplace. There Nanky placed her eye to a crack and peeped through into a tiny shed-room adjoining, then made way for Mrs. Toomer. A barefooted boy sat on a rough work-bench, his elbows on his knees, his cheeks in his hands. His face was freckled, his hair tousled, and his trousers, cotton shirt, and one knit suspender rather dilapidated. Before him was a framework of strings, with two little boxes to represent buckets. The framework extended from the workbench down to the far corner of the room. The boy seemed to be a carved statue, so still was he, and so fixed his gaze.

"Ef ye hed er so much as sneezed," said Nanky

"He got ther critter propped up."

Gunner to her companion when they reëntered the first room, "hit 'u'd er be'n gone. Bill war oncst on ther p'int uv inwentin' er thing ter tie on ther calf thet 'u'd keep 'im f'om suckin' whilst I war er-milkin' an' at ther same time keep ther flies off er ole Brindle too, w'en en warks Tom an' spoilt hit all. Bill war thet disapp'inted he liked ter cried, but 'e tried ter patch up suthin' anyhow thet 'u'd work; but bless yo' soul, 'e tied hit on ther calf an' the first hunch 'e made at ole Brindle ther thing tickled her en ther ribs an' she kicked me an' the bucket erway yonder! Sech er terdo ye never did see. Him, not er-knowin' w'at en ther worl' war ailin' uv th' cow, 'u'd trot up ter suck, an' as soon as ther inwention 'u'd tech 'er en ther ribs, she 'd carry on redickelus, er-runnin' an' jumpin' like ther hornets hed 'er. I like ter laugh myse'f ter death w'en I got my win' f'om th' lick she gin me."

"Es Tom er inwenter too?"

"Tom? Lor', no! Tom an' Bill es twins, but ye would n't know they war blood kin. Tom runs ter huntin' an' ther likes, but 'e 'lows Bill 's got more sense en er day than ther w'ole Hepzibah settlemunt got en er ye'r. Hyah comes Pa."

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of a barefooted man who, walking with the aid of a staff, slowly made his way into the room. He was old and feeble. His bent form was half clad in rough

homespun, and he wore no coat. He paid no attention to either woman, but pulled a chair into the hallway and sat down to chew his quid of tobacco.

"Pa es sorter wand'rin' en 'is min'," said Nanky, simply, "an' 'e can't hyah ther bes' en ther worl', nuther. Bill says es how some these days he 's goin' ter inwent er thing that er man kin hyah with ef 'e ain' even got er ye'r on 'is head." Nanky set her iron aside and walked to the window.

"Cis'ly Toomer," she said, "did ye ever en all yo borned life hyah th' win' blow like thet?"

"Oncst," said her visitor, joining her and scanning the heavens anxiously; "an' I hope ter God I 'll never see sech another day. Hit war over en Putnum, time uv ther cycleone—" She stopped short. Beyond the little valley below them stretched a plain two miles wide, dotted here and there with negro cabins. After freedom the slaves, when permitted, rebuilt their cabins near the particular pieces of land they cultivated; and so it was with the great plantation before them. What broke Cis'ly Toomer's sentence was a fearful cloud that swept out of the woods in the distance and seemed to write upon the plain with its long flexible finger. As it passed along it gathered up trees, fences, cabins, cattle, and dust into one vast mass and strewed them over its track. A sudden darkness fell upon the two awe-stricken women—a

darkness riven by incessant flashes of lightning that darted through the center of the storm from all quarters. There was no thunder, for the roar of the tempest, as it rolled, was like Niagara in its fall, drowning all other sounds. The wind about the cabin increased to a hurricane; but the cyclone had passed. When this fact became apparent, with blanched faces they made their way to the hall. Grasping his chair with both hands, his eyes riveted upon the ravished plain, his chin still trembling, sat the old man.

II.

AFTER some days Bill resumed work upon his spring-bucket idea. He finally succeeded in getting the model to work by putting a rock in the down bucket; but, for obvious reasons, this was not satisfactory. Then he planned a plank-way from the window forty yards down the hill to the spring, and a car on wheels. At this stage in the evolution of the idea he was interrupted by something new, which consigned the self-acting, labor-saving, traveling-buckets to the companionship of his other unfinished contrivances. The cyclone had caused intense excitement. The destruction to life and property and the hair-breadth escapes were absorbing topics, and the reports of other cyclones, gathered from newspapers, were eagerly discussed and magnified. People began to think of cyclone retreats as refuges in stormy times. One day Tom offered to bet the seed cotton in his patch that Bill could fix up something that would puzzle any cyclone in the world; and thus the train was fired in the brain of the family genius. Something was needed that could be reached quickly without exposure to the elements. In the recent storm a

negro had taken refuge in a cellar; but the house had fallen in and taken fire, and the negro had lost his life. So the refuge must be apart from the house to insure complete safety. Thus Bill in the solitude of his workshop reasoned.

The rough plan of his water-railroad caught his eye, and an old dairy near the bottom of the hill flashed into his recollection. Then the true plan was perfected in his mind.

The Gunner dwelling was upon the site of one of the great ante-bellum homes that disappeared when Sherman marched through Georgia, and the spacious dairy dug out of the hillside and fronting upon the little ravine that ran down to the spring was a monument to the old family which had dwelt there. Bill's idea was a covered passage leading from a window down the hill and by a sharp curve into the dairy. Burning with the fever of the scheme, he communicated his plans to Tom and secured at once a powerful ally. The two boys picked cotton at forty cents per hundred for a neighboring planter and secured money enough to buy the necessary lumber, and Bill went to work upon the structure. The diameter of the shute was determined by measuring Nanky Gunner's chair-seat, and a week's hard work completed the structure. It was three feet wide and three high, inside measurement. The upper end rested in the window and the lower entered the old subterranean

dairy, the rest of the opening there being closed with stout boards and dirt. For a long time Bill debated upon a traveling railway to run down the passage he had constructed, but the idea involved new difficulties, such as pulleys, wheels, and ropes, and consequently a considerable outlay of money—something not obtainable, for the boys had bankrupted their resources in the purchasing of lumber. Besides, the fever of the idea was hot upon them. At this juncture Tom offered a suggestion. It was the nearest approach to an invention he had ever made.

"Bill," said he in his hearty way, "folk as es gittin' erway f'om er cycleone ain't expected ter move erbout in style like they were er-gwine ter er quiltin'. All they wants ter do es ter git up an' git tell the things blows over. Now hit do seem ter me thet ther way ter fix thet ar thing es ter grease them bottom planks thar, an' w'en ther time comes ter be er-movin' jes git en an' scoot down ter ther bottom. Hit ain't gwine ter be much used, an' I reckon we kin stan' hit."

Bill surveyed him admiringly. "Tom," said he, "er inwenter hisse'f cain't beat ye on thet."

And so it was. One day when they had the premises clear they removed the top planks and greased the floorway to the bottom of the hill, until a squirrel would have found it difficult to navigate it. Then they restored the planks, and waited. But

no cyclone came. Nanky Gunner surveyed the structure many a day curiously, but she asked no questions. To a neighbor she said once, "I cain't say thet I see edzactly as how ther thing es gwine ter work; but Bill es er inwenter an' he knows. He says thar ain't no use en gittin' skeered uv cycleones an' ther like." It is probably not true that the boys prayed for a storm, but every wind raised hopes in their bosoms, and not a cloud passed but brought suggestions.

"Bill," said Tom one night as they lay awake, "I reckon hit 's all right, but 'pears ter me we hed n't oughter take no chances; we oughter know."

Bill was silent, trying to catch the line of Tom's thought. It was beneath the dignity of an inventor to ask suggestions.

Tom continued: "W'en we war over ter Macon las' ye'r 'ith ther cotton, ye ricolleck how they used ter ring ther bells an' turn out ther thing ter put out fires 'ith w'en ther war n't no fire ter put out? Er feller tole me they war er-practzin' ter know jes w'at ter do ef er sho 'nough fire war ter come erlong. Looks like we oughter practiz fer cycleones. Ye know Grandpa es contrairy, an' Ma es pow'ful hefty —" Bill was all excitement in an instant, and sitting up.

"Tom," said he, "let 's try hit ter-night." But Tom's judgment was cooler.

"Hit won't do ter-night. Thar ain't no win', an' Ma 'u'd never let us practiz on 'er 'lessen she war pow'ful skeered. Wait tell er big win' comes."

Fortune favored the inventors. There came a week of heavy rain and finally one night a terrific wind.

III.

"Nankee-e-e-e-e, Nank Gunner-r-r-r!" The tones were feminine and rang out shrilly in the morning quiet.

Mistress Gunner came to the door of the shed-room, late the haunt of the born inventor. She had been washing clothes, and her sleeves were rolled up, exhibiting short, fat, red arms.

"Howdy, Cis'ly Toomer, howdy. 'Light," she answered back. Cis'ly Toomer guided her thin plow-horse under a tree and slid to the ground. The breeze was swaying some garments hanging on the clothes-line that she had to stoop to avoid as she approached. Nanky wiped her hand upon her apron and welcomed her.

"Come in, come in," she said. "Hearn ye war done gone back ter Putnum. Lemme wring out these hyah shirts an' I 'll be done." She resumed her position at the tub, and from time to time turned her head as the conversation went on. Cis'ly looked about her as she took her seat, and got out her snuff-cup and mop.

"La, Nanky, w'at ye done 'ith Bill's things?"

"Bill," said the woman at the tub, shaking her fat sides a little, "ain't er-inwentin much these days."

"How come?"

"Well, Cis'ly Toomer, hit 's er long story. Hit all come uv ther cycleone erwhile back an' Bill tryin' ter inwent suthin' ter beat hit."

"La sakes, an' would n't hit work?"

"Work?" Nanky Gunner rested her hands on her tub and looked around quickly. "I reckon ye never seen nuthin' work like hit. Hit mighty nigh worked me an' Pa ter death."

"Nanky, hush!"

"Fact. Hit 's piled up thar behin' ther house now, but hit ain' nuthin' like it war w'en hit war fixed up an' ready fur cycleones."

She described the invention as it had existed, and as she became conscious of the rapt attention of her visitor, she exerted her full powers.

"Now," she continued, "hain't nobody on yarth skeereder 'n me uv win'. One night atter hit hed b'en er-rainin' fur er week an' ther win' war blowin' pow'ful, I war settin' up an' Pa he war en bed er-tryin' ter git ter sleep, w'en I hearn er boomin' en ther a'r outside." She laughed at the recollection, and as she wrung the last drop of moisture from a shirt, faced her visitor. "Ever hyah one uv 'em thar injines w'at burn coal 'stidder wood — boom-m-m?"

She imitated the sound as best she could. "Well, they done got ter runnin' 'em on ther railroad out thar back uv ther house, an' ther first one come erlong thet night an' ther boomin' started 'bout ther time hit got en ther big cut. I never war skeered as bad since ther Lor' made me. I run 'cross ther room an' jerked Pa up en bed. 'Git up, git up!' I hollered. Jes then Bill an' Tom come er-runnin' en too, yellin' out, 'Cycleone, cycleone!' loud as they could. I war mighty ready ter drop. 'Save Pa, save Pa!' I hollered. Pa he half knowed w'at war gwine on, an' he hollered, 'Help, help!' an war gittin' out, w'en ther boys got 'im back uv 'is shoulders an' unner 'is legs an' run 'cross ther room an' shoved 'im foot foremost inter ther inwention. Pa he hollered, 'Heigh! ho! Nank! Tom!' an' war gone. I got thar jes en time ter see 'is white head go roun' ther ben', an' then I hearn er kerchunk an' Pa holler, 'Hoo-oo-oo-oo!'" Nanky threw the wet garment down in a chair and shook with laughter over the recollection. "I orter hed mo' sense; but la, w'en er woman git skeered bad she ain' got no sense 't all. Ther injine then war right back uv ther house, an' ev'ythin' war jes trimblin'. Bill he yelled out, 'Git en, Ma, git en; hit 's er-comin'!' I did n't wait er minute, but clum up en er cher an' got en. Ther boys gimme a shove, an' down I went 'ith ther candle en my han' berhin' an' me flat er back. I reckon I mighty nigh fill ther

w'ole inwention, fur I war techin' ev'ywhar. Skeered? The cycleone war n't nuthin'. Time I got ter ther ben' I war full uv splinters, fur Pa lef' some, an w'en I slid roun' like er gourd over ther mill-dam an' hit en two feet uv water down thar, I war screamin' ter be hearn er mile. Tom an' Bill like ter not come, hit skeered them so, but ther injine war then er mighty nigh shakin' ther pans offen ther she'f, an' down they come too, kerchunk en ther water. Ye see, they hed stopped up ther ole dairy 'ith planks an' dirt tell it hel' water like er well, an' ther rain hed soaked down. Ther place war dark as pitch, an' w'at 'ith me er-screamin' an' Pa er-settin' over en ther corner hollerin', 'Don't shoot, don't shoot!' hit like ter skeered ther life outer Bill; an' erbout thet time it come ter 'im thet he had n' inwented no way ter git outer ther thing. I war screamin', 'Git me outen hyah, an' open ther do'!' an', 'Oh, Lordy, my back!' till ther boy war mighty nigh crazy."

Cis'ly Toomer had been rolling around her chair convulsed with laughter. "Nank, how en ther worl' did ye git out?" she gasped.

"Tom clum back up ther spout atter mighty hard work an' took er ax an' busted ther dairy open. Me an' him pulled Pa out an' put 'im en bed. Yer never seed sech er sight en yo' life like Pa's back. We pick splinters outer hit tell broad day, an' all time 'im er-hollerin', 'Don't shoot, don't shoot!' Pa's back hed

er heap er little white scars on hit, an' I reckolleck hearin' tell as how somebody caught 'im en er watermelon patch w'en he war er boy an' filled 'im full uv shot jes as he war crossin' ther fence. I reckon ther splinters sorter brought hit all back ter 'im. He 's mighty wand'rin' en 'is min' nowadays." She took an armful of clothes and went out to the line, where she continued, elevating her voice: "Me an' Bill hed it out en ther shed-room thar, an' w'en I got done 'ith 'im I kicked all ther inwentions ter pieces. 'No more inwentin' en this house,' says I; 'hit 's as much as my life es wuth.' An' I put 'im ter work nex' day. See them two boys over yonner en the cotton by the p'int uv woods?" Cis'ly stood up and shaded her eyes in the direction indicated by Nanky's extended hand. "One uv them es ther 'borned inwenter'"; and Nanky laughed lightly. "But hit ain' gwine ter do no good, not er bit. Hit 's still er-workin' en 'im, an' Tom let out yestiddy thet Bill done inwented er thing thet 'll pick mo' cotton en er day than ten niggers. I reckon time ther cotton es all en I 'll hev ter move them tubs out ther shed-room ergin. Boys got ter hev ther day, yer know, an' Bill es ther baby."

TOM'S STRATEGY.

I.

HA' yer gwine do wi' dat gun?" It was Tempy Taylor who propounded the question, and she did it in a tone of voice that would have attracted anybody's attention. She was a tall, heavy, masculine woman of some two hundred odd pounds, and as she straightened up over the washtub under the chinaberry tree at the end of her cabin, she was indeed a formidable looking figure. Her great black, muscular arms drooped towards the scrubbing-board that reclined in the tub, and her hands grasped a wet garment upon which she had been expending some of her prodigious strength. The person addressed was a small old man whose face was pretty well covered with a gray, kinky beard. He nervously shifted the weapon he bore, an ancient muzzle-loading fowl-

ing-piece with a wire-wrapped stock and reed ramrod, and affected an easy conciliatory manner.

"Des gwine down yander on de crik. Ole buck rabbit down dere ev'y day 'bout dis time. 'Spec' he oughter be en de pan time Mammy Jo' git heah en de morndin'." The voice was drawling and childlike in its modulations. He struck the right chord and very skillfully. Mammy Jo' was the mother of the Amazon at the tub, and had sent word of her intended visit. The little old man moved off slowly with a peculiar shuffling motion. "Dat 'possum mighty fine back yander," he ventured, with a motion of his head towards the cabin, "but 't ain't gwine ter las' all day." As he passed on his ear waited for a harsh summons, but heard only the mutterings of his spouse when she plunged a little more vigorously into her work. The little strip of pine woods towards which his face was turned seemed to approach at a snail's pace only, but he was afraid to change the gait he had chosen. As he stepped at last into the friendly cover of the trees he stole a backward glance over his shoulder, and then abruptly quickened his motions. At the same instant his whole manner changed, and when presently he heard his name echo through the wood, borne upon the imperative tones of a pair of prodigious female lungs, he laughed aloud and held on his way. The woman at the tub talked to herself.

"Mighty takin' on 'bout Mammy Jo' all er sudd'n. Mammy Jo'! Mammy Jo'! Heap hé kyar 'bout Mammy Jo'," she laughed scornfully. "Better be out en dat patch pick'n' cott'n or en dem pease. Ef hit wuz lef' ter *him*, dat steer go 'long ter town ter be sold, 'stidder de cott'n-bag. I know him; he can't fool me. Gi' 'im time an' he go skipp'n' 'bout over yonner at de Stillson place, de lyin' little debbil." She gave the shirt of her absent lord a vicious wring as if she felt him in it, and lifted up her voice, obeying a sudden impulse:

"You Torm!!!" There was no reply except a few echoes that mocked her. "He heah me," she continued, resuming her labors; and then she resumed too the thread of her revery. "'Morndin', Sis' 'Lizer; how yo' he'th ter-day, ma'am? Morndin', Sis' Chloey; I hope yer feelin' berry well, ma'am.'" She imitated the insinuating, childlike tones of her absent spouse and repeated her scornful laugh. "Nex' time I heah 'bout 'im gwine over deir, I 'll bre'k ev'y bone en 'is triflin' hide."

But Tom was thinking no longer of his industrious and indignant spouse. He was rapidly moving along the new line of departure from home and the haunts of the buck rabbit in the creek bottom. He had a slight limp, caused by a bale of cotton rolling against his leg when he was young, and as he trotted along, his funny little figure bobbing up and down caused

"Wha' yer gwine do wi' dat gun?"

the powder-horn under his arm and the shot-gourd to swing out and collide fiercely.

A couple of miles glided away thus, when suddenly out from under his feet a rabbit scurried a few yards away, and pricking up his ears looked back at the rude disturber of his afternoon ramble. Tom brought the gun down across his knee, cocked it successfully, the hammer going back half a circle with three distinct clicks, rested it for a moment against a tree, aimed long and carefully, and pulled the trigger. There was a deafening explosion; the little old man staggered back six feet, the muzzle of his gun dropped to the ground, and the rabbit sprung high in the air, turned a somersault, and fell dead. Had there been a witness present, he would have observed that the ground about the unfortunate animal was more or less torn up for a space of twenty feet square. Tom rushed in and secured his prize, then carefully reloaded his weapon and resumed his journey. He had not gone far before a rooster, leading his family among the dead leaves of some scrub oaks, straightened up and uttered an inquiring cackle. At the same instant a hound near at hand gave vent to a prolonged howl, and barking fiercely galloped out towards the new-comer. Tom entered a small clearing, where stood a log-cabin with a garden at the rear, guarded from a couple of cadaverous-looking pigs and the chickens by a split-picket fence reën-

forced with brush. In the doorway sat a young woman twisting her hair into the tight little rolls which all of the kinky-headed race affect under the idea that straight hair will finally result therefrom.

"How yer do, Sis' Chayney? How yo' he'th terday, ma'am?" Tom had reduced his gait, and his voice rose and fell melodiously. The woman laughed, showing a mouthful of dazzling teeth.

"I'm toler'ble. Set down. How yer do, Unc' Torm?"

"Des so, so." He laid the rabbit on the single step beside her feet and continued facetiously:

"'Spec' dat rabbit knowed wha' I wuz gwine, an' des git right en de way ter come erlong too." The woman laughed again. She stole a look at Tom as she sat up with both hands over her head, engaged upon a final knot.

"How 'e know?"

Tom raised his eyebrows and scratched his ear.

"He knowed I warn' gwine home," he said slowly; and meeting the comic look on his face with one of intelligence, she threw her head back and gave expression to her mood again. She did not thank him for the gift, but took it up as she rose and turned it over. "Rabbit fat," she said, and laid it on the water-bucket shelf, just inside. "How yer lef' Aunt Tempy?"

"She putty well," said Tom, carelessly. He was studying the toe of his foot visible through a rift in his well-worn brogan. Again the laugh of the woman, this time from the inside of the house, reached him.

"Tempy gwine ter be heah en dis worl' w'en you an' me done gone," she called out. Tom passed his hand over his face and looked as if the idea was not a pleasant one. "Better bring yo' cher enside, added the woman after a few moments, and he complied. Then she began to busy herself straightening things in the simple room, and as she worked the conversation went on.

"Unc' Josh Sims gwine ter preach ter-morrow," she said. "He come erlong heah des now an' he 'low dat he wuz gwine ter turn all de niggers over 'bout heah, 'count er dey debblement."

"Dey es er-needin' hit," said Tom. "Ef I had er seen 'im I 'd er got squar' wid some, sho' 's *you* born."

"Oom-hoo! An' I reck'n some seen 'im 'fo' now an' ten' ter dat 'head er you. Maybe some done got squar' wid ole man Torm." She was passing him as she spoke, and gave him a sharp slap on the jaw.

II.

WHEN Tom, warned by the sinking sun, set his face homeward, he took a course that would carry him in or about the creek bottom to which he had ostensibly set out. His way led him by the log church in which a neighborhood preacher or elder held forth every Sunday, except when the famous and eccentric Rev. Joshua Sims visited it, which was three or four times a year. As he approached the edifice, which stood in a pine thicket and boasted of a bush-arbor awning in front, he heard the voice of a preacher breaking loudly upon the afternoon calm. Never before had Tom known of a church meeting on Saturday afternoon. It was the time universally claimed by the negroes for town shopping or loafing He knew of no one recently dead; and, besides, had any one died that late in the week the body would have been saved until Sunday. In open-mouthed astonishment, therefore, Tom approached at the side. Sure enough "preaching" was going on. His first impulse was to enter; but, still suspicious, he placed his eye at a crevice and looked through. There was only one person within the church, and that was the

Rev. Joshua Sims. Standing in the pulpit, he was preaching to an imaginary audience the sermon evidently prepared for the next day. Tom squatted down on his haunches, and a broad, comprehensive grin lighted his face as he realized the situation. The speaker thundered over the book lying upon the pulpit, slapping it vigorously from time to time, and walking from side to side. Half of the Rev. Joshua Sims's success lay in his figure, tempestuous delivery, and thrilling tones, and he knew it. The sermon was delivered in a shout, and wherever in a sentence the speaker sought for a word he would prolong the preceding tone with "er-rer." Sometimes saliva from his mouth flew over the pulpit into the vacant auditorium, as foam is tossed from a horse's mouth.

Tom had missed the text and indeed most of the sermon, but this much reached him through the crevice:

"Shake off yo' weights! Shake 'em off! Dey es good ter put on er race-horse w'en dey es er-trainin' 'im; but w'en de time come ter race dey must be shook off. Ef yer gwine ter run er race wid de debble shake off dem weights, an' go et fum de drop er de hat.

"Shake off yo' weights! Shake 'em off! Sister, ef hit 's fine clo'es, shake 'em off! Shake 'em off! Dey ain' no fine clo'es in hebben; de angels don't wear nuthin' but de plaines' kine. Yer can't run no race

wid er long gown hangin' ter yer an' er bustle an' er hoop er-floppin' roun'. Yer can't run no race wid dem sacks an' high hats an' fedders ter ketch de win', an' dem high-heel shoes er-ketchin' en de grass. Shake 'em off! Shake off yo' weights!

"Shake off yo' weights! Shake 'em off, brudders! Yer can't run er race wid de debble an' yer full er whisky. Er wise man 'ill take er gourd er spring water at de start an' go barefooted, like Moses roun' de bush, an' trus' de Lord, when 'e want mo', ter run er branch 'cross de road, like 'e does fur de mule gwine ter town. Shake off de weights; shake 'em off!

"Shake off yo' weights! How does po' sinner run? He runs wid de weights on, an' debble keep right 'long at 'is heels, so close sinner heah him laugh. Dey trabble 'long tergedder, an' bimeby, 'fo' dey gits ter de las' mile-pos', debble trip up po' sinner an' win de race. Shake off yo' weights! Oh, shake 'em off!

"How do de righteous run? He strips off de weights an' cuts out. Mos' 'fo' yer know 'e gwine run, 'e done gone; an' debble come erlong an' find trail so cole 'e don't know wha' good man gone, an' 'e win de race. Shake off yo' weights! yer all got weights, an' I 'm gwine tell yer 'bout 'em. . Deir 's sump'n enside already tell yer, but I 'm gwine ter tell out loud so ev'ybody know yer been tole." He descended from the pulpit and marched up to the

amen corner, still talking. "Here 's Bre'r Dan! Here 's Bre'r Dan! Bre'r Dan got weights, an' 'e ain' shake 'em off. What es dem weights's name? Too much corn en 'is crib fur de size er 'is crop! Too much cott'n en 'is crib fur de size er 'is patch! Too many chickens en de pan fur two hens an' er rooster! Too many shotes erbout Chrismus fur er no-sow man. Shake off yo' weights, Bre'r Dan; shake 'em off! Oh, w'at es sech er sinner like? He like er one-legged grasshopper, w'a' think 'e es er-jumpin' somewhar, w'en ev'ybody know 'e jes tu'nnin' roun' en de road, p'intin' er new way ev'y time."

Tom rolled over on the ground outside and kicked his heels in the air, convulsed with laughter. "Somebody done got squar' wid Unc' Dan," he gasped. Then he quickly rose up and glued his eye to the crack again. The preacher was standing with uplifted hands over another imaginary sinner.

"An' heah ole Black Aleck! Bre'r Aleck got weights. No chutch on Sunday fur Aleck. Mus' fish tro'tline an' hunt squ'r'l. Mus' hoe de gyardin an' hunt guinea-nes' en de jimsun weeds. Mus' do anythin' but heah de Lord's word, 'cept'n' ole Unc' Josh come ter preach. Dem de weights Bre'r Aleck got. Shake 'em off, er-rer! Shake 'em off! Oh, w'at es sech er sinner like? He like er las'-ye'r wasp en er spider web—holler an' dry, an' 'is wings won't flop no mo'.

"An' heah es Bre'r Clay. Heah es my dear Bre'r Clay. Bre'r Clay got weights. W'at kind er weights 'e tryin' ter run wid? Lazy weights. Won't work cott'n-patch, won't work tater-patch, won't work collurd-patch, won't work nowhar. O Lord! did anybody ever see er lazy man win er race? 'T ain't gwine ter he'p yer, Bre'r Clay, ter put on dem good clo'es heah an' say 'Amen,' an' 'Bless de King,' an' 'He'p, Lord!' loud 'n anybody ef yer lef' de ole 'ooman an' de chillun ter work all de week. Shake off de weights, Bre'r Clay. Shake 'em off! Oh, w'at es sech er sinner like? He like er tadpole en er mud-puddl', w'at done dry up 'fo' time come fur 'im ter drop 'is tail an be er frog."

Tom went over on the ground while Black Aleck was being dealt with, and he was too weak with laughter to sit up during the time devoted to Clay. Presently he heard:

"An' heah Sis' Tilly. Heah es dear Sis' Tilly. W'at es Sis' Tilly's weights? She got weights ter shake off. She run roun' tellin' tales on oth'r 'oomen's husbun's ——"

"Ooom-hoo!"

Tom cocked his head up as he uttered this assenting exclamation and listened.

"An' she scole ——"

"Dat 's right!"

"An' mek troubl' ev'ywhar she go."

"Somebody done got squar' wid Aun' Tilly!" Tom ducked his head down and rolled over again.

"Shake 'em off, deah sister! Shake 'em off! Oh, w'at es sech er sinner like? She like er cockleburr en de tail uv er dry cowhide an' gone ter markit; no good heah an' no good deir.

"An' heah Bre'r Torm." The preacher was right over the crevice, and his voice sounded like thunder in the ears of the startled eavesdropper outside. "Little Bre'r Torm. He tryin' ter run wid big weights. W'at es Bre'r Torm's weights? He heah ter se dis 'ooman, an' yonder ter see dat 'ooman; fus' one way an' den ernudder, an' er wife down yonner home t'ink 'e gone huntin' ev'y time 'e take 'is gun." A horrible groan broke from the lips of the trembling man without, and a cold sweat started forth all over him. In a frenzy of terror he raised himself to his knees and brought the old gun to full cock. Then realizing what he was doing he returned the hammer to a safer place with feverish anxiety. The Rev. Joshua Sims heard nothing but his own voice. "Shake 'em off, Bre'r Torm! Shake 'em off! Yer can't run no race wid dem weights er-hangin' on yer. Oh, w'at es sech er sinner like? He like er snake en de grass, an' fus' t'ing 'e know 'e gwine ter lan' en de fire wid 'is back broke."

Tom's hilarity was all gone. If that sermon was preached on the morrow he might not literally land in

the fire with his back broke, but his back would suffer until the sensations would make it appear so. He left almost as suddenly as his mirth. Gliding into the woods he made his way to the bend in the road, then, as if struck with a new idea, stopped short and took a seat on a stump. In an attitude of profound reflection he waited until, having finished his sermon, the preacher came down the road with great dignity. When he reached the vicinity of the little man the latter started suddenly, looked over his shoulder, and an affable and delighted expression dawned upon his face.

"How do yer do, Bre'r Sims? Lord, I wuz des er-sayin' how I 'u'd like ter see Bre'r Sims, an' heah 'e come er-walkin' right erlong." By this time he was up and shaking the new-comer's hand. "Wha' yer gwine dis time er day?" The Rev. Joshua returned the greeting, but with less demonstration.

"Well, I wuz er-gwine down ter Sis' Thomson's."

"Wha' dat!" Tom threw up both hands in well-affected astonishment. "Man, night ketch yer 'fo' yer git half way deir! No, sah; yer come erlong wid me. Tempy 'll be proud ter see Bre'r Sims, an' I 'spect by now dat 'possum w'at wuz er-cookin' 'while back done got done." Tom laughed, and slapped his companion on the back. The Rev. Joshua Sims was a large, heavy man, with a round, full jaw and a well-fed look. It really mattered little to him where he

spent the night, and the 'possum decided the point. He suffered himself to be led off. Tom, having gotten himself well under way, continued gayly:

"I knowed dat 'possum up ter sump'n. Las' night de rooster call me ter run deir quick. Bre'r 'Possum wuz squattin' en de hen-hous' des like 'e been sont fur an' come; an' heah 't is." Tom wagged his head sagaciously. "Oomp! Ef I c'u'd des jump Bre'r Rabbit now, 'spect he 'd he'p bre'kfus' mightily." And he began to peer around with a great show of eagerness.

"Did n't yer shoot erwhile back? Heah somebody over yonner 'bout Sis' Chayney's."

Tom shook his head. "'Spect dat wuz one dem Gillus boys. Dey all time bangin' way over deir. When Tom shoot, sump'n gwine hang 'bout 'is clo'es." He lifted the gun quickly and sighted it towards a clump of bushes, then took it down.

"Dat mullein leaf down deir fool me. Look mighty like er molly-cott'n."[1] But Brother Sims plodded along behind the loquacious little man, his mind on other things again.

[1] Rabbit.

III.

TEMPY received the pair graciously. She was a devout church woman on Sundays. Like most negro women, she had infinite respect for preachers; and this respect in the case of the Rev. Joshua Sims was mixed with something of fear, for his methods in the pulpit were exceedingly pointed and personal, as has perhaps been gathered, and ridicule has a disastrous effect upon ignorant people. She vied with Tom in attentions to the shepherd. One placed a chair near the door; the other brought a gourd of water. One took his hat and Bible; the other got him a fan. Presently there came a lull in their ministrations, for the reason that there was nothing left to be done for the gnest. Then Tom plucked the sleeve of his life partner at an opportune moment and glided out the back door behind the chicken-house. Puzzled by this demonstration, Tempy looked out after him. Presently she saw his head thrust out and his features working mysteriously. She took a pan in her hand as if on some domestic mission and went behind the chicken-house also. Tom straightened up

his little body and looked her full in the face. Her mountain of flesh loomed above him, but his assumption of a common danger had made him bold.

"Put dat 'possum on de table, Tempy," he said in a tragic whisper.

"W'at I gwine ter put Mamma Jo's 'possum on table fur?" In her surprise and indignation she did not trouble herself to subdue her voice. Tom grasped her with both hands.

"Sh-h-h-h!" he said. "Don't let 'im heah, Tempy"; and his voice was just audible, while his features shifted themselves as under the pressure of some great emotion. "I wuz er-comin' 'long by de chutch des now an' Bre'r Sims wuz en deir er-preachin' by hisse'f, er-gittin' ready fur ter-morrer. He des gi' de niggers de wuss raspin' y' ever heah — Dan, an' Clay, an' Aleck, an' Sis' Tilly —" A low chuckle escaped from Tempy's lips.

"Need n' laugh; he tech on you too."

"W'at 'e say 'bout me?"

Tempy bristled up, but instantly looked around as if afraid of being heard.

"Sh-h-h! He gi' yer fits. Can't tell w'at 'e did say. Somebody been tellin' lies 'bout yer, sho'. He ain' say nuthin' 'bout *me*, but 'e gi' yer de wuss sort er name fur lyin' an' er-tarkin' 'roun'—"

"Be deir in one minute!" Tom elevated his voice as if he heard the Rev. Joshua Sims calling. "Put

II.

WHEN Tom, warned by the sinking sun, set his face homeward, he took a course that would carry him in or about the creek bottom to which he had ostensibly set out. His way led him by the log church in which a neighborhood preacher or elder held forth every Sunday, except when the famous and eccentric Rev. Joshua Sims visited it, which was three or four times a year. As he approached the edifice, which stood in a pine thicket and boasted of a bush-arbor awning in front, he heard the voice of a preacher breaking loudly upon the afternoon calm. Never before had Tom known of a church meeting on Saturday afternoon. It was the time universally claimed by the negroes for town shopping or loafing He knew of no one recently dead; and, besides, had any one died that late in the week the body would have been saved until Sunday. In open-mouthed astonishment, therefore, Tom approached at the side. Sure enough "preaching" was going on. His first impulse was to enter; but, still suspicious, he placed his eye at a crevice and looked through. There was only one person within the church, and that was the

Rev. Joshua Sims. Standing in the pulpit, he was preaching to an imaginary audience the sermon evidently prepared for the next day. Tom squatted down on his haunches, and a broad, comprehensive grin lighted his face as he realized the situation. The speaker thundered over the book lying upon the pulpit, slapping it vigorously from time to time, and walking from side to side. Half of the Rev. Joshua Sims's success lay in his figure, tempestuous delivery, and thrilling tones, and he knew it. The sermon was delivered in a shout, and wherever in a sentence the speaker sought for a word he would prolong the preceding tone with "er-rer." Sometimes saliva from his mouth flew over the pulpit into the vacant auditorium, as foam is tossed from a horse's mouth.

Tom had missed the text and indeed most of the sermon, but this much reached him through the crevice:

"Shake off yo' weights! Shake 'em off! Dey es good ter put on er race-horse w'en dey es er-trainin' 'im; but w'en de time come ter race dey must be shook off. Ef yer gwine ter run er race wid de debble shake off dem weights, an' go et fum de drop er de hat.

"Shake off yo' weights! Shake 'em off! Sister, ef hit's fine clo'es, shake 'em off! Shake 'em off! Dey ain' no fine clo'es in hebben; de angels don't wear nuthin' but de plaines' kine. Yer can't run no race

wid er long gown hangin' ter yer an' er bustle an' er hoop er-floppin' roun'. Yer can't run no race wid dem sacks an' high hats an' fedders ter ketch de win', an' dem high-heel shoes er-ketchin' en de grass. Shake 'em off! Shake off yo' weights!

"Shake off yo' weights! Shake 'em off, brudders! Yer can't run er race wid de debble an' yer full er whisky. Er wise man 'ill take er gourd er spring water at de start an' go barefooted, like Moses roun' de bush, an' trus' de Lord, when 'e want mo', ter run er branch 'cross de road, like 'e does fur de mule gwine ter town. Shake off de weights; shake 'em off!

"Shake off yo' weights! How does po' sinner run? He runs wid de weights on, an' debble keep right 'long at 'is heels, so close sinner heah him laugh. Dey trabble 'long tergedder, an' bimeby, 'fo' dey gits ter de las' mile-pos', debble trip up po' sinner an' win de race. Shake off yo' weights! Oh, shake 'em off!

"How do de righteous run? He strips off de weights an' cuts out. Mos' 'fo' yer know 'e gwine run, 'e done gone; an' debble come erlong an' find trail so cole 'e don't know wha' good man gone, an' 'e win de race. Shake off yo' weights! yer all got weights, an' I 'm gwine tell yer 'bout 'em. . Deir 's sump'n enside already tell yer, but I 'm gwine ter tell out loud so ev'ybody know yer been tole." He descended from the pulpit and marched up to the

amen corner, still talking. "Here 's Bre'r Dan! Here 's Bre'r Dan! Bre'r Dan got weights, an' 'e ain' shake 'em off. What es dem weights's name? Too much corn en 'is crib fur de size er 'is crop! Too much cott'n en 'is crib fur de size er 'is patch! Too many chickens en de pan fur two hens an' er rooster! Too many shotes erbout Chrismus fur er no-sow man. Shake off yo' weights, Bre'r Dan; shake 'em off! Oh, w'at es sech er sinner like? He like er one-legged grasshopper, w'a' think 'e es er-jumpin' somewhar, w'en ev'ybody know 'e jes tu'nnin' roun' en de road, p'intin' er new way ev'y time."

Tom rolled over on the ground outside and kicked his heels in the air, convulsed with laughter. "Somebody done got squar' wid Unc' Dan," he gasped. Then he quickly rose up and glued his eye to the crack again. The preacher was standing with uplifted hands over another imaginary sinner.

"An' heah ole Black Aleck! Bre'r Aleck got weights. No chutch on Sunday fur Aleck. Mus' fish tro'tline an' hunt squ'r'l. Mus' hoe de gyardin an' hunt guinea-nes' en de jimsun weeds. Mus' do anythin' but heah de Lord's word, 'cept'n' ole Unc' Josh come ter preach. Dem de weights Bre'r Aleck got. Shake 'em off, er-rer! Shake 'em off! Oh, w'at es sech er sinner like? He like er las'-ye'r wasp en er spider web—holler an' dry, an' 'is wings won't flop no mo'.

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